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**THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL**

WITH PORTRAITS, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND FACSIMILES

IN SIXTEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME V

66



Mr. Lowell in 1877

AMONG MY BOOKS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

First and Second Series



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME III

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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DANTE



DANTE¹

1872

ON the banks of a little river so shrunken by the suns of summer that it seems fast passing into a tradition, but so swollen by the autumnal rains with Italian suddenness of passion that the massy bridge shudders under the impatient heap of waters behind it, stands a city which, in its period of bloom not so large as Boston, may well rank next to Athens in the history which teaches *come l' uom s' eterna*.

Originally only a convenient spot in the valley where the fairs of the neighboring Etruscan city of Fiesole were held, it gradually grew from a huddle of booths to a town, and then to a city, which absorbed its ancestral neighbor and became a cradle for the arts, the letters, the science, and the commerce² of modern Europe. For her

¹ *The Shadow of Dante*, being an Essay towards studying Himself, his World, and his Pilgrimage. By Maria Francesca Rossetti.

“Se Dio te lasci, lettore, prender frutto
Di tua lezione.”

Boston: Roberts Brothers. 1872. 8vo, pp. 296.

² The Florentines should seem to have invented or re-invented banks, book-keeping by double-entry, and bills of ex-

Cimabue wrought, who infused Byzantine formalism with a suggestion of nature and feeling; for her the Pisani, who divined at least, if they could not conjure with it, the secret of Greek supremacy in sculpture; for her the marvellous boy Ghiberti proved that unity of composition and grace of figure and drapery were never beyond the reach of genius;¹ for her Brunelleschi curved the dome which Michael Angelo hung in air on St. Peter's; for her Giotto reared the bell-tower graceful as an Horatian ode in marble; and the great triumvirate of Italian poetry, good sense, and culture called her mother. There is no modern city about which cluster so many elevating associations, none in which the past is so contemporary with us in unchanged buildings and

change. The last, by endowing Value with the gift of fern-seed and enabling it to walk invisible, turned the flank of the baronial tariff system and made the roads safe for the great liberalizer, Commerce. This made Money omnipresent, and prepared the way for its present omnipotence. Fortunately it cannot usurp the third attribute of Deity, — omniscience. But whatever the consequences, this Florentine invention was at first nothing but admirable, securing to brain its legitimate influence over brawn. The latter has begun its revolt, but whether it will succeed better in its attempt to restore mediæval methods than the barons in maintaining them remains to be seen.

¹ Ghiberti's designs have been criticised by a too systematic æstheticism, as confounding the limits of sculpture and painting. But is not the *rilievo* precisely the bridge by which the one art passes over into the territory of the other?

undisturbed monuments. The house of Dante is still shown; children still receive baptism at the font (*il mio bel San Giovanni*) where he was christened before the acorn dropped that was to grow into a keel for Columbus; and an inscribed stone marks the spot where he used to sit and watch the slow blocks swing up to complete the master-thought of Arnolfo. In the convent of St. Mark hard by lived and labored Beato Angelico, the saint of Christian art, and Fra Bartolommeo, who taught Raphael dignity. From the same walls Savonarola went forth to his triumphs, short-lived almost as the crackle of his martyrdom. The plain little chamber of Michael Angelo seems still to expect his return; his last sketches lie upon the table, his staff leans in the corner, and his slippers wait before the empty chair. On one of the vine-clad hills, just without the city walls, one's feet may press the same stairs that Milton climbed to visit Galileo. To an American there is something supremely impressive in this cumulative influence of a past full of inspiration and rebuke, something saddening in this repeated proof that moral supremacy is the only one that leaves monuments and not ruins behind it. Time, who with us obliterates the labor and often the names of yesterday, seems here to have spared almost the prints of the *care piante* that shunned the sordid paths of worldly honor.

Around the courtyard of the great Museum of Florence stand statues of her illustrious dead, her poets, painters, sculptors, architects, inventors, and statesmen; and as the traveller feels the ennobling lift of such society, and reads the names or recognizes the features familiar to him as his own threshold, he is startled to find Fame as commonplace here as Notoriety everywhere else, and that this fifth-rate city should have the privilege thus to commemorate so many famous men her sons, whose claim to preëminence the whole world would concede. Among them is one figure before which every scholar, every man who has been touched by the tragedy of life, lingers with reverential pity. The haggard cheeks, the lips clamped together in unfaltering resolve, the scars of lifelong battle, and the brow whose stern outline seems the trophy of final victory, — this, at least, is a face that needs no name beneath it. This is he who among literary fames finds only two that for growth and immutability can parallel his own. The suffrages of highest authority would now place him second in that company where he with proud humility took the sixth place.¹

Dante (Durante, by contraction Dante) degli Alighieri was born at Florence in 1265, probably during the month of May.² This is the

¹ *Inferno*, iv. 102.

² The *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* gives May 8 as his

- - - - -

Dante



date given by Boccaccio, who is generally followed, though he makes a blunder in saying, *sedendo Urbano quarto nella cattedra di San Pietro*, for Urban died in October, 1264. Some, misled by an error in a few of the early manuscript copies of the "Divina Commedia," would have him born five years earlier, in 1260. According to Arriyabene,¹ Sansovino was the first to confirm Boccaccio's statement by the authority of the poet himself, basing his argument on the first verse of the "Inferno," —

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita"; —

the average age of man having been declared by the Psalmist to be seventy years, and the period of the poet's supposed vision being unequivocally fixed at 1300.² Leonardo Aretino and Manetti add their testimony to that of Boccaccio, and 1265 is now universally assumed as the true date.³ Voltaire, nevertheless, places the

birthday. This is a mere assumption, for Boccaccio only says generally May. The indication which Dante himself gives that he was born when the sun was in Gemini would give a range from about the middle of May to about the middle of June, so that the 8th is certainly too early.

¹ *Secolo di Dante*, Udine edition of 1828, vol. iii. part 1. p. 578.

² Arrivabene, however, is wrong. Boccaccio makes precisely the same reckoning in the first note of his Commentary (*Bocc. Comento*, etc., Firenze, 1844, vol. i. pp. 32, 33).

³ *Dict. Phil.* art. "Dante."

poet's birth in 1260, and jauntily forgives Bayle (who, he says, *écrivait à Rotterdam* currente calamo *pour son libraire*) for having been right, declaring that he esteems him neither more nor less for having made a mistake of five years. Oddly enough, Voltaire adopts this alleged blunder of five years on the next page, in saying that Dante died at the age of fifty-six, though he still more oddly omits the undisputed date of his death (1321), which would have shown Bayle to be right. The poet's descent is said to have been derived from a younger son of the great Roman family of the Frangipani, classed by the popular rhyme with the Orsini and Colonna:—

“Colonna, Orsini, e Frangipani,
Prendono oggi e pagano domani.”

That his ancestors had been long established in Florence is an inference from some expressions of the poet, and from their dwelling having been situated in the more ancient part of the city. The most important fact of the poet's genealogy is, that he was of mixed race, the Alighieri being of Teutonic origin. Dante was born, as he himself tells us,¹ when the sun was in the constellation Gemini, and it has been absurdly inferred, from a passage in the “Inferno,”² that his horoscope was drawn and a great destiny predicted for him by his teacher, Brunetto Latini. The

¹ *Paradiso*, xxii.

² Canto xv.

"Ottimo Comento" tells us that the Twins are the house of Mercury, who induces in men the faculty of writing, science, and of acquiring knowledge. This is worth mentioning as characteristic of the age and of Dante himself, with whom the influence of the stars took the place of the old notion of destiny.¹ It is supposed, from a passage in Boccaccio's life of Dante, that Alighiero the father was still living when the poet was nine years old. If so, he must have died soon after, for Leonardo Aretino, who wrote with original documents before him, tells us that Dante lost his father while yet a child. This circumstance may have been not without influence in muscularizing his nature to that character of self-reliance which shows itself so constantly and sharply during his after-life. His tutor was Brunetto Latini, a very superior man (for that age), says Aretino parenthetically. Like Alexander Gill, he is now remembered only as the schoolmaster of a great poet, and that he did his duty well may be inferred from Dante's speaking of him gratefully as one who by times "taught him how man eternizes himself." This, and what Villani says of his refining the Tuscan idiom (for so we understand his *farli scorti in bene parlare*²) are to be noted as of probable

¹ *Purgatorio*, xvi.

² Though he himself preferred French, and wrote his *Li Tresors* in that language for two reasons, "*l'una perchè noi*

influence on the career of his pupil. Of the order of Dante's studies nothing can be certainly affirmed. His biographers send him to Bologna, Padua, Paris, Naples, and even Oxford. All are doubtful, Paris and Oxford most of all, and the dates utterly undeterminable. Yet all are possible, nay, perhaps probable. Bologna and Padua we should be inclined to place before his exile; Paris and Oxford, if at all, after it. If no argument in favor of Paris is to be drawn from his *Pape Satan*¹ and the corresponding *paix*, *paix*, *Sathan*, in the autobiography of Cellini, nor from the very definite allusion to Doctor Sigier,² we may yet infer from some passages in the "Commedia" that his wanderings had extended even farther;³ for it would not be hard to show that his comparisons and illustrations from outward things are almost invariably drawn from actual eyesight. As to the nature of his studies, there can be no doubt that he went through the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) of the then ordinary university course. To these he afterward added

siamo in Francia, e l'altra perchè la parlatura francesca è più dilettevole e più comune che tutti li altri linguaggi."
(*Proemio, sul fine.*)

¹ *Inferno*, canto vii.

² *Paradiso*, canto x.

³ See especially *Inferno*, ix. 112 et seq.; xii. 120; xv. 4 et seq.; xxxii. 25-30.

painting (or at least drawing, — *disegnava un angelo sopra certe tavolette*¹), theology, and medicine. He is said to have been the pupil of Cimabue, and was certainly the friend of Giotto, the designs for some of whose frescos at Assisi and elsewhere have been wrongly attributed to him, though we may safely believe in his helpful comment and suggestion. To prove his love of music, the episode of Casella were enough, even without Boccaccio's testimony. The range of Dante's study and acquirement would be encyclopædic in any age, but at that time it was literally possible to master the *omne scibile*, and he seems to have accomplished it. How lofty his theory of science was, is plain from this passage in the "Convito": "He is not to be called a true lover of wisdom (*filosofo*) who loves it for the sake of gain, as do lawyers, physicians, and almost all churchmen (*li religiosi*), who study, not in order to know, but to acquire riches or advancement, and who would not persevere in study should you give them what they desire to gain by it. . . . And it may be said that (as true friendship between men consists in each wholly loving the other) the true philosopher loves every part of wisdom, and wisdom every part of the philosopher, inasmuch as she draws all to herself, and allows no one of his thoughts to wander to other things."² The "Convito"

¹ *Vita Nuova*, c. xxxv.

² Tratt. III. cap. xi.

gives us a glance into Dante's library. We find Aristotle (whom he calls the philosopher, the master) cited seventy-six times; Cicero, eighteen; Albertus Magnus, seven; Boëthius, six; Plato (at second hand), four; Aquinas, Avicenna, Ptolemy, the Digest, Lucan, and Ovid, three each; Virgil, Juvenal, Statius, Seneca, and Horace, twice each; and Algazzali, Alfrogon, Augustine, Livy, Orosius, and Homer (at second hand), once. Of Greek he seems to have understood little; of Hebrew and Arabic, perhaps more. But it was not only in the closet and from books that Dante received his education. He acquired, perhaps, the better part of it in the streets of Florence, and later, in those homeless wanderings which led him (as he says) wherever the Italian tongue was spoken. His were the only open eyes of that century, and, as nothing escaped them, so there is nothing that was not photographed upon his sensitive brain, to be afterward fixed forever in the "Commedia." What Florence was during his youth and manhood, with its Guelphs and Ghibellines, its nobles and trades, its Bianchi and Neri, its kaleidoscopic revolutions, "all parties loving liberty and doing their best to destroy her," as Voltaire says, it would be beyond our province to tell even if we could. Foreshortened as events are when we look back on them across so many ages, only the upheavals of party con-

flict catching the eye, while the spaces of peace between sink out of the view of history, a whole century seems like a mere wild chaos. Yet during a couple of such centuries the cathedrals of Florence, Pisa, and Siena got built; Cimabue, Giotto, Arnolfo, the Pisani, Brunelleschi, and Ghiberti gave the impulse to modern art, or brought it in some of its branches to its culminating point; modern literature took its rise; commerce became a science, and the middle class came into being. It was a time of fierce passions and sudden tragedies, of picturesque transitions and contrasts. It found Dante, shaped him by every experience that life is capable of, — rank, ease, love, study, affairs, statecraft, hope, exile, hunger, dependence, despair, — until he became endowed with a sense of the nothingness of this world's goods possible only to the rich, and a knowledge of man possible only to the poor. The few well-ascertained facts of Dante's life may be briefly stated. In 1274 occurred what we may call his spiritual birth, the awakening in him of the imaginative faculty, and of that profounder and more intense consciousness which springs from the recognition of beauty through the antithesis of sex. It was in that year that he first saw Beatrice Portinari. In 1289 he was present at the battle of Campaldino, fighting on the side of the Guelphs who there utterly routed the

Ghibellines, and where, he says characteristically enough, "I was present, not a boy in arms, and where I felt much fear, but in the end the greatest pleasure, from the various changes of the fight."¹ In the same year he assisted at the siege and capture of Caprona.² In 1290 died Beatrice, married to Simone dei Bardi, precisely when is uncertain, but before 1287, as appears by a mention of her in her father's will, bearing date January 15 of that year. Dante's own marriage is assigned to various years, ranging from 1291 to 1294; but the earlier date seems the more probable, as he was the father of seven children (the youngest, a daughter, named Beatrice) in 1301. His wife was Gemma dei Donati, and through her Dante, whose family, though noble, was of the lesser nobility, became nearly connected with Corso Donati, the head of a powerful clan of the *grandi*, or greater nobles. In 1293 occurred what is called the revolution of Gian Della Bella, in which the priors of the trades took the power into their own hands, and made nobility a disqualification for office. A noble was defined to be any one who counted a knight among his ancestors, and thus the descendant of Cacciaguida was excluded.

Della Bella was exiled in 1295, but the nobles did not regain their power. On the contrary,

¹ Letter of Dante, now lost, cited by Aretino.

² *Inferno*, xxi. 94.

the citizens, having all their own way, proceeded to quarrel among themselves, and subdivided into the *popolani grossi* and *popolani minuti*, or greater and lesser trades, — a distinction of gentility somewhat like that between wholesale and retail tradesmen. The *grandi* continuing turbulent, many of the lesser nobility, among them Dante, drew over to the side of the citizens, and between 1297 and 1300 there is found inscribed in the book of the physicians and apothecaries, *Dante d' Aldighiero, degli Aldighieri, poeta Fiorentino*.¹ Professor de Vericour thinks it necessary to apologize for this lapse on the part of the poet, and gravely bids us take courage, nor think that Dante was ever an apothecary.² In 1300 we find him elected one of the priors of the city. In order to a perfect misunderstanding of everything connected with the Florentine politics of this period, one has only to study the various histories. The result is a spectrum on the mind's eye, which looks definite and brilliant, but really hinders all accurate vision, as if from too steady inspection of a Catharine-wheel in full whirl. A few words, however, are necessary, if only to make the confusion palpable. The rival German families of Welfs and Weiblingens had given their names, softened into Guelfi and Ghibellini, —

¹ Balbo, *Vita di Dante*, Firenze, 1853, p. 117.

² *Life and Times of Dante*, London, 1858, p. 80.

from which Gabriel Harvey¹ ingeniously, but mistakenly, derives elves and goblins, — to two parties in Northern Italy, representing respectively the adherents of the pope and of the emperor, but serving very well as rallying-points in all manner of intercalary and subsidiary quarrels. The nobles, especially the greater ones, — perhaps from instinct, perhaps in part from hereditary tradition, as being more or less Teutonic by descent, — were commonly Ghibellines, or Imperialists ; the bourgeoisie were very commonly Guelphs, or supporters of the pope, partly from natural antipathy to the nobles, and partly, perhaps, because they believed themselves to be espousing the more purely Italian side. Sometimes, however, the party relation of nobles and burghers to each other was reversed, but the names of Guelph and Ghibelline always substantially represented the same things. The family of Dante had been Guelphic, and we have seen him already as a young man serving two campaigns against the other party. But no immediate question as between pope and emperor seems then to have been pending ; and while there is no evidence that he was ever a mere partisan, the reverse would be the inference from his habits and character. Just before his assumption of the priorate, however, a new complication had arisen. A family feud, begin-

¹ Notes to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*.

ning in the neighboring city of Pistoja, between the Cancellieri Neri and Cancellieri Bianchi,¹ had extended to Florence, where the Guelphs took the part of the Neri and the Ghibellines of the Bianchi.² The city was instantly in a ferment of street brawls, as actors in one of which some of the Medici are incidentally named, — the first appearance of that family in history. Both parties appealed at different times to the pope, who sent two ambassadors, first a bishop and then a cardinal. Both pacificators soon flung out again in a rage, after adding the new element of excommunication to the causes of confusion. It was in the midst of these things that Dante became one of the six priors (June, 1300), — an office which the Florentines had made bimestrial in its tenure, in order apparently to secure at least six constitutional chances of revolution in the year. He advised that the leaders of both parties should be banished to the frontiers, which was forthwith done; the ostracism including his relative Corso Donati among the Neri, and his most intimate friend the poet Guido Cavalcanti

¹ See the story at length in Balbo, *Vita di Dante*, cap. x.

² Thus Foscolo. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that at first the blacks were the extreme Guelphs, and the whites those moderate Guelphs inclined to make terms with the Ghibellines. The matter is obscure, and Balbo contradicts himself about it.

among the Bianchi. They were all permitted to return before long (though after Dante's term of office was over), and came accordingly, bringing at least the Scriptural allowance of "seven other" motives of mischief with them. Affairs getting worse (1301), the Neri, with the connivance of the pope (Boniface VIII.), entered into an arrangement with Charles of Valois, who was preparing an expedition to Italy. Dante was meanwhile sent on an embassy to Rome (September, 1301, according to Arrivabene,¹ but probably earlier) by the Bianchi, who still retained all the offices at Florence. It is the tradition that he said in setting forth: "If I go, who remains? and if I stay, who goes?" Whether true or not, the story implies what was certainly true, that the counsel and influence of Dante were of great weight with the more moderate of both parties. On October 31, 1301, Charles took possession of Florence in the interest of the Neri. Dante being still at Rome (January 27, 1302), sentence of exile was pronounced against him and others, with a heavy fine to be paid within two months; if not paid, the entire confiscation of goods, and, whether paid or no, exile; the charge against him being pecuniary malversation in office. The fine not

¹ *Secolo di Dante*, p. 654. He would seem to have been in Rome during the Jubilee of 1300. See *Inferno*, xviii. 28-33.

paid (as it could not be without admitting the justice of the charges, which Dante scorned even to deny), in less than two months (March 10, 1302) a second sentence was registered, by which he with others was condemned to be burned alive if taken within the boundaries of the republic.¹ From this time the life of Dante becomes semi-mythical, and for nearly every date we are reduced to the "as they say" of Herodotus. He became now necessarily identified with his fellow exiles (fragments of all parties united by common wrongs in a practical, if not theoretic, Ghibellinism), and shared in their attempts to reinstate themselves by force of arms. He was one of their council of twelve, but withdrew from it on account of the unwisdom of their measures. Whether he was present at their futile assault on Florence (July 22, 1304) is doubtful, but probably he was not. From the "Ottimo Comento," written at least in part² by a contemporary as early as 1333, we learn that Dante soon separated himself from his companions in misfortune with mutual

¹ That Dante was not of the *grandi*, or great nobles (what we call grantees), as some of his biographers have tried to make out, is plain from this sentence, where his name appears low on the list and with no ornamental prefix, after half a dozen *domini*. Bayle, however, is equally wrong in supposing his family to have been obscure.

² See Witte, *Quando e da chi sia composto l' Ottimo Comento*, etc. (Leipzig, 1847.)

discontents and recriminations.¹ During the nineteen years of Dante's exile, it would be hard to say where he was not. In certain districts of Northern Italy there is scarce a village that has not its tradition of him, its *sedia*, *rocca*, *spelonca*, or *torre di Dante*; and what between the patriotic complaisance of some biographers overwilling to gratify as many provincial vanities as possible, and the pettishness of others anxious only to snub them, the confusion becomes hopeless.² After his banishment we find some definite trace of him first at Arezzo with Ugucione della Faggiuola; then at Siena; then at Verona with the Scaligeri. He himself says: "Through almost all parts where this language [Italian] is spoken, a wanderer, well-nigh a beggar, I have gone, showing against my will the wound of fortune. Truly I have been a

¹ *Ott. Com. Parad.* xvii.

² The loose way in which many Italian scholars write history is as amazing as it is perplexing. For example: Count Balbo's *Life of Dante* was published originally at Turin, in 1839. In a note (lib. i. cap. x.) he expresses a doubt whether the date of Dante's banishment should not be 1303, and inclines to think it should be. Meanwhile, it seems never to have occurred to him to employ some one to look at the original decree, still existing in the archives. Stranger still, Le Monnier, reprinting the work at Florence in 1853, within a stone's-throw of the document itself, and with full permission from Balbo to make corrections, leaves the matter just where it was.

vessel without sail or rudder, driven to diverse ports, estuaries, and shores by that hot blast, the breath of grievous poverty; and I have shown myself to the eyes of many who perhaps, through some fame of me, had imagined me in quite other guise, in whose view not only was my person debased, but every work of mine, whether done or yet to do, became of less account.”¹ By the election of the Emperor Henry VII. (of Luxemburg, November, 1308), and the news of his proposed expedition into Italy, the hopes of Dante were raised to the highest pitch. Henry entered Italy, October, 1310, and received the iron crown of Lombardy at Milan, on the day of Epiphany, 1311. His movements being slow, and his policy undecided, Dante addressed him that famous letter, urging him to crush first the “Hydra and Myrrha” Florence, as the root of all the evils of Italy (April 16, 1311). To this year we must probably assign the new decree by which the seigniorship of Florence recalled a portion of the exiles, excepting Dante, however, among others, by name.² The undertaking of Henry, after an

¹ *Convito*, tratt. i. cap. iii.

² Macchiavelli is the authority for this, and is carelessly cited in the preface to the Udine edition of the *Codex Bartolinianus* as placing it in 1312. Macchiavelli does no such thing, but expressly implies an earlier date, perhaps 1310. (See Macch. *Op.* ed. Baretto, London, 1772, vol. i. p. 60.)

ill-directed dawdling of two years, at last ended in his death at Buonconvento (August 24, 1313; Carlyle says wrongly September); poisoned, it was said, in the sacramental bread, by a Dominican friar, bribed thereto by Florence.¹ The story is doubtful, the more as Dante nowhere alludes to it, as he certainly would have done had he heard of it. According to Balbo, Dante spent the time from August, 1313, to November, 1314, in Pisa and Lucca, and then took refuge at Verona, with Can Grande della Scala (whom Voltaire calls, drolly enough, *le grand-can de Vérone*, as if he had been a Tartar), where he remained till 1318. Foscolo with equal positiveness sends him, immediately after the death of Henry, to Guido da Polenta² at Ravenna, and makes him join Can Grande only after the latter became captain of the Ghibelline league in December, 1318. In 1316 the government of Florence set forth a new decree allowing the exiles to return on conditions of fine and penance. Dante rejected the offer (by accepting which his guilt would have been admitted), in

¹ See Carlyle's *Frederic*, vol. i. p. 147.

² A mistake, for Guido did not become lord of Ravenna till several years later. But Boccaccio also assigns 1313 as the date of Dante's withdrawal to that city, and his first protector may have been one of the other Polentani to whom Guido (surnamed Novello, or the Younger; his grandfather having borne the same name) succeeded.

a letter still hot, after these five centuries, with indignant scorn. "Is this then the glorious return of Dante Alighieri to his country after nearly three lustres of suffering and exile? Did an innocence, patent to all, merit this? — this, the perpetual sweat and toil of study? Far from a man, the housemate of philosophy, be so rash and earthen-hearted a humility as to allow himself to be offered up bound like a school-boy or a criminal! Far from a man, the preacher of justice, to pay those who have done him wrong as for a favor! This is not the way of returning to my country; but if another can be found that shall not derogate from the fame and honor of Dante, that I will enter on with no lagging steps. For if by none such Florence may be entered, by me then never! Can I not everywhere behold the mirrors of the sun and stars, speculate on sweetest truths under any sky, without first giving myself up inglorious, nay, ignominious, to the populace and city of Florence? Nor shall I want for bread." Dionisi puts the date of this letter in 1315.¹ He is certainly

¹ Under this date (1315) a fourth *condemnatio* against Dante is mentioned *facta in anno 1315 de mense Octobris per D. Rainerium, D. Zacharii de Urbiveteri, olim et tunc vicarium regium civitatis Florentiae*, etc. It is found recited in the decree under which in 1342 Jacopo di Dante redeemed a portion of his father's property, to wit: *Una possessione cum vinea et cum domibus super ea, combustis et non combustis, posita in populo S. Miniatis de Pagnola. In the domibus com-*

wrong, for the decree is dated December 11, 1316. Foscolo places it in 1316, Troya early in 1317, and both may be right, as the year began March 25. Whatever the date of Dante's visit to Voltaire's great Khan¹ of Verona, or the length of his stay with him, may have been, it is certain that he was in Ravenna in 1320, and that, on his return thither from an embassy to Venice (concerning which a curious letter, forged probably by Doni, is extant), he died on September 14, 1321 (13th, according to others). He was buried at Ravenna under a monument built by his friend, Guido Novello.² Dante

bustis we see the blackened traces of Dante's kinsman by marriage, Corso Donati, who plundered and burnt the houses of the exiled Bianchi, during the occupation of the city by Charles of Valois. (See *De Romanis*, notes on Tiraboschi's *Life of Dante*, in the Florence ed. of 1830, vol. v. p. 119.)

¹ Voltaire's blunder has been made part of a serious theory by Mons. E. Aroux, who gravely assures us that, during the Middle Ages, Tartar was only a cryptonym by which heretics knew each other, and adds: *Il n'y a donc pas trop à s'étonner des noms bizarres de Mastino et de Cane donnés à ces Della Scala. (Dante, hérétique, révolutionnaire, et socialiste, Paris, 1854, pp. 118-120.)*

² If no monument at all was built by Guido, as is asserted by Balbo (*Vita*, i. lib. ii. cap. xvii.), whom De Vericour copies without question, we are at a loss to account for the preservation of the original epitaph replaced by Bernardo Bembo when he built the new tomb, in 1483. Bembo's own inscription implies an already existing monument, and, if in disparaging terms, yet epitaphial Latin verses are not to be taken

said to have dictated the following inscription for it on his death-bed : —

IVRA MONARCHIAE SVPEROS PHLEGETHONTA LACVSQVE
LVSTRANDO CECINI VOLVERVNT FATA QVOVSQVE
SED QVIA PARS CESSIT MELIORIBVS HOSPITA CASTRIS
AVCTOREMQVE SVVM PETIIT FELICIOR ASTRIS
HIC CLAVDOR DANTES PATRIIS EXTORRIS AB ORIS
QVEM GENVIT PARVI FLORENTIA MATER AMORIS.

Of which this rude paraphrase may serve as a translation : —

The rights of Monarchy, the Heavens, the Stream of Fire,
the Pit,

In vision seen, I sang as far as to the Fates seemed fit;
But since my soul, an alien here, hath flown to nobler wars,
And, happier now, hath gone to seek its Maker 'mid the stars,
Here am I Dante shut, exiled from the ancestral shore,
Whom Florence, the of all least-loving mother, bore.¹

too literally, considering the exigencies of that branch of literary ingenuity. The doggerel Latin has been thought by some unworthy of Dante, as Shakespeare's doggerel English epitaph has been thought unworthy of him. In both cases the rudeness of the verses seems to us a proof of authenticity. An enlightened posterity with unlimited superlatives at command, and in an age when stone-cutting was cheap, would have aimed at something more befitting the occasion. It is certain, at least in Dante's case, that Bembo would never have inserted in the very first words an allusion to the *De Monarchia*, a book long before condemned as heretical.

¹ We have translated *lacusque* by "the Pit," as being the nearest English correlative. Dante probably meant by it the several circles of his Hell, narrowing, one beneath the other, to the centre. As a curious specimen of English we subjoin Professor de Vericour's translation: "I have sang the rights

If these be not the words of Dante, what is internal evidence worth? The indomitably self-reliant man, loyal first of all to his most unpopular convictions (his very host, Guido, being a Guelph), puts his Ghibellinism (*jura monarchiae*) in the front. The man whose whole life, like that of selected souls always, had been a warfare, calls heaven another camp, — a better one, thank God! The wanderer of so many years speaks of his soul as a guest, — glad to be gone, doubtless. The exile, whose sharpest reproaches of Florence are always those of an outraged lover, finds it bitter that even his unconscious bones should lie in alien soil.

Giovanni Villani, the earliest authority, and a contemporary, thus sketches him: "This man was a great scholar in almost every science, though a layman; was a most excellent poet, philosopher, and rhetorician; perfect, as well in composing and versifying as in haranguing; a most noble speaker. . . . This Dante, on account of his learning, was a little haughty, and shy, and disdainful, and like a philosopher of monarchy; I have sang, in exploring them, the abode of God, the Phlegethon and the impure lakes, as long as destinies have permitted. But as the part of myself, which was only passing, returns to better fields, and happier, returned to his Maker, I, Dante, exiled from the regions of fatherland, I am laid here, I, to whom Florence gave birth, a mother who experienced but a feeble love." (*The Life and Times of Dante*, London, 1858, p. 208.)

almost ungracious, knew not well how to deal with unlettered folk." Benvenuto da Imola tells us that he was very abstracted, as we may well believe of a man who carried the "Commedia" in his brain. Boccaccio paints him in this wise: "Our poet was of middle height; his face was long, his nose aquiline, his jaw large, and the lower lip protruding somewhat beyond the upper; a little stooping in the shoulders; his eyes rather large than small; dark of complexion; his hair and beard thick, crisp, and black; and his countenance always sad and thoughtful. His garments were always dignified; the style such as suited ripeness of years; his gait was grave and gentlemanlike; and his bearing, whether public or private, wonderfully composed and polished. In meat and drink he was most temperate, nor was ever any more zealous in study or whatever other pursuit. Seldom spake he, save when spoken to, though a most eloquent person. In his youth he delighted especially in music and singing, and was intimate with almost all the singers and musicians of his day. He was much inclined to solitude, and familiar with few, and most assiduous in study as far as he could find time for it. Dante was also of marvellous capacity and the most tenacious memory." Various anecdotes of him are related by Boccaccio, Sacchetti, and others, none of them verisimilar, and some of them at least fifteen centuries old

when revamped. Most of them are neither *veri* nor *ben trovati*. One clear glimpse we get of him from the "Ottimo Comento," the author of which says: ¹ "I, the writer, heard Dante say that never a rhyme had led him to say other than he would, but that many a time and oft (*molte e spesse volte*) he had made words say for him what they were not wont to express for other poets." That is the only sincere glimpse we get of the living, breathing, word-compelling Dante.

Looked at outwardly, the life of Dante seems to have been an utter and disastrous failure. What its inward satisfactions must have been, we, with the "Paradiso" open before us, can form some faint conception. To him, longing with an intensity which only the word *Dantesque* will express to realize an ideal upon earth, and continually baffled and misunderstood, the far greater part of his mature life must have been labor and sorrow. We can see how essential all that sad experience was to him, can understand why all the fairy stories hide the luck in the ugly black casket; but to him, then and there, how seemed it?

Thou shalt relinquish everything of thee,
Beloved most dearly; this that arrow is
Shot from the bow of exile first of all;
And thou shalt prove how salt a savor hath
The bread of others, and how hard a path
To climb and to descend the stranger's stairs! ²

¹ *Inferno*, x. 85.

² *Paradiso*, xvii.

Come sa di sale. Who never wet his bread with tears, says Goethe, knows ye not, ye heavenly powers! Our nineteenth century made an idol of the noble lord who broke his heart in verse once every six months, but the fourteenth was lucky enough to produce and not to make an idol of that rarest earthly phenomenon, a man of genius who could hold heartbreak at bay for twenty years, and would not let himself die till he had done his task. At the end of the "*Vita Nuova*," his first work, Dante wrote down that remarkable aspiration that God would take him to himself after he had written of Beatrice such things as were never yet written of woman. It was literally fulfilled when the "*Commedia*" was finished twenty-five years later.

Scarce was Dante at rest in his grave when Italy felt instinctively that this was her great man. Boccaccio tells us that in 1329¹ Cardinal Poggetto (du Poiet) caused Dante's treatise "*De Monarchia*" to be publicly burned at Bologna, and proposed further to dig up and burn the bones of the poet at Ravenna, as having been a heretic; but so much opposition was roused that he thought better of it. Yet this was during the pontificate of the Frenchman, John XXII., whose damnation the poet himself seems to

¹ He says after the return of Louis of Bavaria to Germany, which took place in that year. The *De Monarchia* was afterward condemned by the Council of Trent.

prophecy,¹ and against whose election he had endeavored to persuade the cardinals, in a vehement letter. In 1350 the republic of Florence voted the sum of ten golden florins to be paid by the hands of Messer Giovanni Boccaccio to Dante's daughter Beatrice, a nun in the convent of Santa Chiara at Ravenna. In 1396 Florence voted a monument, and begged in vain for the metaphorical ashes of the man of whom she had threatened to make literal cinders if she could catch him alive. In 1429² she begged again, but Ravenna, a dead city, was tenacious of the dead poet. In 1519 Michael Angelo would have built the monument, but Leo X. refused to allow the sacred dust to be removed. Finally, in 1829, five hundred and eight years after the death of Dante, Florence got a cenotaph fairly built in Santa Croce (by Ricci), ugly beyond even the usual lot of such, with three colossal figures on it, Dante in the middle, with Italy on one side and Poesy on the other. The tomb at Ravenna, built originally in 1483, by the father of Cardinal Bembo, was restored by Cardinal Corsi in 1692, and finally rebuilt in its present form by Cardinal Gonzaga in 1780, all three of whom commemorated themselves in Latin inscriptions. It is a little shrine covered with a dome, not unlike the

¹ *Inferno*, xi. 50.

² See the letter in Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d' artisti* (Firenze, 1839), vol. i. p. 123.

tomb of a Mohammedan saint, and is now the chief magnet which draws foreigners and their gold to Ravenna. The *valet de place* says that Dante is not buried under it, but beneath the pavement of the street in front of it, where also, he says, he saw my Lord Byron kneel and weep. Like everything in Ravenna, it is dirty and neglected.

In 1373 (August 9) Florence instituted a chair of the "Divina Commedia," and Boccaccio was named first professor. He accordingly began his lectures on Sunday, October 3, following, but his comment was broken off abruptly at the 17th verse of the 17th canto of the "Inferno" by the illness which ended in his death, December 21, 1375. Among his successors were Filippo Villani and Filelfo. Bologna was the first to follow the example of Florence, Benvenuto da Imola having begun his lectures, according to Tiraboschi, so early as 1375. Chairs were established also at Pisa, Venice, Piacenza, and Milan before the close of the century. The lectures were delivered in the churches and on feast-days, which shows their popular character. Balbo reckons (but this, though probable, is guess-work) that the MS. copies of the "Divina Commedia" made during the fourteenth century, and now existing in the libraries of Europe, are more numerous than those of all other works, ancient and modern, made during the same

period. Between the invention of printing and the year 1500 more than twenty editions were published in Italy, the earliest in 1472. During the sixteenth century there were forty editions; during the seventeenth, — a period, for Italy, of sceptical dilettantism, — only three; during the eighteenth, thirty-four; and already, during the first half of the nineteenth, at least eighty. The first translation was into Catalan, in 1428.¹ M. Saint-René Taillandier says that the “*Commedia*” was condemned by the Inquisition in Spain; but this seems too general a statement, for, according to Foscolo,² it was the commentary of Landino and Vellutello, and a few verses in the “*Inferno*” and “*Paradiso*,” which were condemned. The first French translation was that of Grangier, 1596, but the study of Dante struck no root there till the present century. Rivarol, who translated the “*Inferno*” in 1783, was the first Frenchman who divined the wonderful force and vitality of the “*Commedia*.”³ The expressions of Voltaire represent very well the average opinion of cultivated persons in respect of Dante in the middle of the eighteenth century. He says: “The Italians call him divine; but it is a hidden divinity; few people

¹ Saint-René Taillandier, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, December 1, 1856, says into Spanish.

² *Dante*, vol. iv. p. 116.

³ Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, tome xi. p. 169.

understand his oracles. He has commentators, which, perhaps, is another reason for his not being understood. His reputation will go on increasing, because scarce anybody reads him."¹ To Father Bettinelli he writes: "I estimate highly the courage with which you have dared to say that Dante was a madman and his work a monster." But he adds, what shows that Dante had his admirers even in that flippant century: "There are found among us, and in the eighteenth century, people who strive to admire imaginations so stupidly extravagant and barbarous."² Elsewhere he says that the "Commedia" was "an odd poem, but gleaming with natural beauties, a work in which the author rose in parts above the bad taste of his age and his subject, and full of passages written as purely as if they had been of the time of Ariosto and Tasso."³ It is curious to see this antipathetic fascination which Dante exercised over a nature so opposite to his own.

At the beginning of this century Châteaubriand speaks of Dante with vague commendation, evidently from a very superficial acquaintance, and that only with the "Inferno," probably from Rivarol's version.⁴ Since then there have

¹ *Dict. Phil.* art. "Dante."

² *Corresp. gén.* Œuvres, tome lvii. pp. 80, 81.

³ *Essai sur les mœurs*, Œuvres, tome xvii. pp. 371, 372.

⁴ *Génie du Christianisme*, cap. iv.

been four or five French versions in prose or verse, including one by Lamennais. But the austerity of Dante will not condescend to the conventional elegance which makes the charm of French, and the most virile of poets cannot be adequately rendered in the most feminine of languages. Yet in the works of Fauriel, Ozanam, Ampère, and Villemain, France has given a greater impulse to the study of Dante than any other country except Germany. Into Germany the "*Commedia*" penetrated later. How utterly Dante was unknown there in the sixteenth century is plain from a passage in the "*Vanity of the Arts and Sciences*" of Cornelius Agrippa, where he is spoken of among the authors of lascivious stories: "There have been many of these historical pandars, of which some of obscure fame, as Æneas Sylvius, Dantes, and Petrarch, Boccace, Pontanus," etc.¹ The first German translation was that of Bachenschwanz (1767-69). Versions by Kannegiesser, Streckfuss, Kopisch, and Prince John of Saxony, followed. Goethe seems never to have given that attention to Dante which his ever-alert intelligence might have been expected to bestow on so imposing a moral and æsthetic phenomenon. Unless the conclusion of the second part of "*Faust*" be an inspiration of the "*Paradiso*," we remember no adequate word from him on

¹ Ed. London, 1684, p. 199.

this theme. His remarks on one of the German translations are brief, dry, and without that breadth which comes only of thorough knowledge and sympathy. But German scholarship and constructive criticism, through Witte, Kopisch, Wegele, Ruth, and others, have been of preëminent service in deepening the understanding and facilitating the study of the poet. In England the first recognition of Dante is by Chaucer in the "Hugelin of Pisa" of the "Monkes Tale,"¹ and an imitation of the opening verses of the third canto of the "Inferno" ("Assembly of Foules"). In 1417 Giovanni da Serravalle, bishop of Fermo, completed a Latin prose translation of the "Commedia," a copy of which, as he made it at the request of two English bishops whom he met at the Council of Constance, was doubtless sent to England. Later we find Dante now and then mentioned, but evidently from hearsay only,² till the time of Spenser, who, like Milton fifty years later, shows

¹ It is worth notice, as a proof of Chaucer's critical judgment, that he calls Dante "the great poet of Itaille," while in the "Clerke's Tale" he speaks of Petrarch as a "worthy clerk," as "the laureat poete" (alluding to the somewhat sentimental ceremony at Rome), and says that his

"Rhetorike sweete
Enlumined all Itaille of poetry."

² It is probable that Sackville may have read the *Inferno*, and it is certain that Sir John Harrington had. See the preface to his translation of the *Orlando Furioso*.

that he had read his works closely. Thenceforward for more than a century Dante became a mere name, used without meaning by literary sciolists. Lord Chesterfield echoes Voltaire, and Dr. Drake in his "Literary Hours" could speak of Darwin's "Botanic Garden" as showing the "wild and terrible sublimity of Dante!" The first complete English translation was by Boyd, — of the "Inferno" in 1785, of the whole poem in 1802. There have been eight other complete translations, beginning with Cary's in 1814, six since 1850, beside several of the "Inferno" singly. Of these that of Longfellow is the best. It is only within the last twenty years, however, that the study of Dante, in any true sense, became at all general. Even Coleridge seems to have been familiar only with the "Inferno." In America Professor Ticknor was the first to devote a special course of illustrative lectures to Dante; he was followed by Longfellow, whose lectures, illustrated by admirable translations, are remembered with grateful pleasure by many who were thus led to learn the full significance of the great Christian poet. A translation of the "Inferno" into quatrains by T. W. Parsons ranks with the best for spirit, faithfulness, and elegance. In Denmark and Russia translations of the "Inferno" have been published, beside separate volumes of comment and illustration.

¹ Second edition, 1800.

We have thus sketched the steady growth of Dante's fame and influence to a universality unparalleled except in the case of Shakespeare, perhaps more remarkable if we consider the abstruse and mystical nature of his poetry. It is to be noted as characteristic that the veneration of Dantophilists for their master is that of disciples for their saint. Perhaps no other man could have called forth such an expression as that of Ruskin, that "the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante."

The first remark to be made upon the writings of Dante is that they are all (with the possible exception of the treatise "*De Vulgari Eloquentia*") autobiographic, and that all of them, including that, are parts of a mutually related system, of which the central point is the individuality and experience of the poet. In the "*Vita Nuova*" he recounts the story of his love for Beatrice Portinari, showing how his grief for her loss turned his thoughts first inward upon his own consciousness, and, failing all help there, gradually upward through philosophy to religion, and so from a world of shadows to one of eternal substances. It traces with exquisite unconsciousness the gradual but certain steps by which memory and imagination transubstantiated the woman of flesh and blood into a holy

ideal, combining in one radiant symbol of sorrow and hope that faith which is the instinctive refuge of unavailing regret, that grace of God which higher natures learn to find in the trial which passeth all understanding, and that perfect womanhood, the dream of youth and the memory of maturity, which beckons toward the forever unattainable. As a contribution to the physiology of genius, no other book is to be compared with the "*Vita Nuova*." It is more important to the understanding of Dante as a poet than any other of his works. It shows him (and that in the midst of affairs demanding practical ability and presence of mind) capable of a depth of contemplative abstraction equalling that of a Soofi who has passed the fourth step of initiation. It enables us in some sort to see how, from being the slave of his imaginative faculty, he rose by self-culture and force of will to that mastery of it which is art. We comprehend the "*Commedia*" better when we know that Dante could be an active, clear-headed politician and a mystic at the same time. Various dates have been assigned to the composition of the "*Vita Nuova*." The earliest limit is fixed by the death of Beatrice in 1290 (though some of the poems are of even earlier date), and the book is commonly assumed to have been finished by 1295; Foscolo says 1294. But Professor Karl Witte, a high au-

thority, extends the term as far as 1300.¹ The title of the book also, "Vita Nuova," has been diversely interpreted. Mr. Garrow, who published an English version of it at Florence in 1846, entitles it the "Early Life of Dante." Balbo understands it in the same way.² But we are strongly of the opinion that "New Life" is the interpretation sustained by the entire significance of the book itself.

His next work in order of date is the treatise "De Monarchia." It has been generally taken for granted that Dante was a Guelph in politics up to the time of his banishment, and that out of resentment he then became a violent Ghibelline. Not to speak of the consideration that there is no author whose life and works present so remarkable a unity and logical sequence as those of Dante, Professor Witte has drawn attention to a fact which alone is enough to demonstrate that the "De Monarchia" was written before 1300. That and the "Vita Nuova" are the only works of Dante in which no allusion whatever is made to his exile. That bitter thought was continually present to him. In the "Convito" it betrays itself often, and with touching unexpectedness. Even in the treatise "De Vulgari Eloquentia," he takes as one of his

¹ *Dante Alighieri's lyrische Gedichte*, Leipzig, 1842, theil ii. pp. 4-9.

² *Vita*, p. 97.

examples of style: "I have most pity for those, whosoever they are, that languish in exile, and revisit their country only in dreams." We have seen that the one decisive act of Dante's priorate was to expel from Florence the chiefs of both parties as the sowers of strife, and he tells us ("Paradiso," xvii.) that he had formed a party by himself. The king of Saxony has well defined his political theory as being "an ideal Ghibellinism,"¹ and he has been accused of want of patriotism only by those short-sighted persons who cannot see beyond their own parish. Dante's want of faith in freedom was of the same kind with Milton's refusing (as Tacitus had done before) to confound license with liberty. The argument of the "De Monarchia" is briefly this: As the object of the individual man is the highest development of his faculties, so is it also with men united in societies. But the individual can only attain the highest development when all his powers are in absolute subjection to the intellect, and society only when it subjects its individual caprices to an intelligent head. This is the order of nature, as in families, and men have followed it in the organization of villages, towns, cities. Again, since God made man in his own image, men and societies most nearly resemble him in proportion as they approach unity. But as in all

¹ *Comment on Paradiso*, vi.

societies questions must arise, so there is need of a monarch for supreme arbiter. And only a universal monarch can be impartial enough for this, since kings of limited territories would always be liable to the temptation of private ends. With the internal policy of municipalities, commonwealths, and kingdoms, the monarch would have nothing to do, only interfering when there was danger of an infraction of the general peace. This is the doctrine of the first book, enforced sometimes eloquently, always logically, and with great fertility of illustration. It is an enlargement of some of the *obiter dicta* of the "Convito." The earnestness with which peace is insisted on as a necessary postulate of civic well-being shows what the experience had been out of which Dante had constructed his theory. It is to be looked on as a purely scholastic demonstration of a speculative thesis, in which the manifold exceptions and modifications essential in practical application are necessarily left aside. Dante almost forestalls the famous proposition of Calvin, "that it is possible to conceive a people without a prince, but not a prince without a people," when he says, *Non enim gens propter regem, sed e converso rex propter gentem*.¹

¹ Jean de Meung had already said, —

"Ge n'en met hors rois ne prélas

Qu'il sunt tui serf au menu pueple."

(*Roman de la Rose* (ed. Méon), v. ii. pp. 78, 79.)

And in his letter to the princess and peoples of Italy on the coming of Henry VII., he bids them "obey their prince, but so as freemen preserving their own constitutional forms." He says also expressly: *Animadvertendum sane, quod cum dicitur humanum genus potest regi per unum supremum principem, non sic intelligendum est ut ab illo uno prodire possint municipia et leges municipales. Habent namque nationes, regna, et civitates inter se proprietates quas legibus differentibus regulari oportet.* Schlosser the historian compares Dante's system with that of the United States.¹ It in some respects resembled more the constitution of the Netherlands under the supreme stadtholder, but parallels between ideal and actual institutions are always unsatisfactory.²

The second book is very curious. In it Dante endeavors to demonstrate the divine right of the Roman Empire to universal sovereignty. One of his arguments is, that Christ consented to be born under the reign of Augustus; another, that he assented to the imperial jurisdiction in allowing himself to be crucified under a decree of one of its courts. The atonement could not have been accomplished unless Christ suffered under sentence of a court having jurisdiction, for otherwise his condemnation would have been

¹ Dante, *Studien*, etc. 1855, p. 144.

² Compare also Spinoza, *Tractat. polit.* cap. vi.

an injustice and not a penalty. Moreover, since all mankind was typified in the person of Christ, the court must have been one having jurisdiction over all mankind; and since he was delivered to Pilate, an officer of Tiberius, it must follow that the jurisdiction of Tiberius was universal. He draws an argument also from the wager of battle to prove that the Roman Empire was divinely permitted, at least, if not instituted. For since it is admitted that God gives the victory, and since the Romans always won it, therefore it was God's will that the Romans should attain universal empire. In the third book he endeavors to prove that the emperor holds by divine right, and not by permission of the pope. He assigns supremacy to the pope in spirituals, and to the emperor in temporals. This was a delicate subject, and though the king of Saxony (a Catholic) says that Dante did not overstep the limits of orthodoxy, it was on account of this part of the book that it was condemned as heretical.¹

Next follows the treatise "*De Vulgari Eloquentia*." Though we have doubts whether we possess this book as Dante wrote it, inclining rather to think that it is a copy in some parts.

¹ It is instructive to compare Dante's political treatise with those of Aristotle and Spinoza. We thus see more clearly the limitations of the age in which he lived, and this may help us to a broader view of him as poet.

textually exact, in others an abstract, there can be no question either of its great glossological value or that it conveys the opinions of Dante. We put it next in order, though written later than the "Convito," only because, like the "De Monarchia," it is written in Latin. It is a proof of the national instinct of Dante, and of his confidence in his genius, that he should have chosen to write all his greatest works in what was deemed by scholars a *patois*, but which he more than any other man made a classic language. Had he intended the "De Monarchia" for a political pamphlet, he would certainly not have composed it in the dialect of the few. The "De Vulgari Eloquentia" was to have been in four books. Whether it was ever finished or not it is impossible to say ; but only two books have come down to us. It treats of poetizing in the vulgar tongue, and of the different dialects of Italy. From the particularity with which it treats of the dialect of Bologna, it has been supposed to have been written in that city, or at least to furnish an argument in favor of Dante's having at some time studied there. In lib. II. cap. II. is a remarkable passage in which, defining the various subjects of song and what had been treated in the vulgar tongue by different poets, he says that his own theme had been righteousness.

The "Convito" is also imperfect. It was to have consisted of fourteen treatises, but, as we

have it, contains only four. In the first he justifies the use of the vulgar idiom in preference to the Latin. In the other three he comments on three of his own "Canzoni." It will be impossible to give an adequate analysis of this work in the limits allowed us.¹ It is an epitome of the learning of that age, philosophical, theological, and scientific. As affording illustration of the "Commedia," and of Dante's style of thought, it is invaluable. It is reckoned by his countrymen the first piece of Italian prose, and there are parts of it which still stand unmatched for eloquence and pathos. The Italians (even such a man as Cantù among the rest) find in it and a few passages of the "Commedia" the proof that Dante, as a natural philosopher, was wholly in advance of his age, — that he had, among other things, anticipated Newton in the theory of gravitation. But this is as idle as the claim that Shakespeare had discovered the circulation of the blood before Harvey,² and one might as well attempt to dethrone Newton because Chaucer speaks of the love which draws the apple to the earth. The truth is, that it was only as a poet that Dante was great and original (glory enough, surely, to have not more than two competitors), and in matters of science, as did all

¹ A very good one may be found in the sixth volume of the Molini edition of Dante, pp. 391-433.

² See Field's *Theory of Colors*.

his contemporaries, sought the guiding hand of Aristotle like a child. Dante is assumed by many to have been a Platonist, but this is not true, in the strict sense of the word. Like all men of great imagination, he was an idealist, and so far a Platonist, as Shakespeare might be proved to have been by his sonnets. But Dante's direct acquaintance with Plato may be reckoned at zero, and we consider it as having strongly influenced his artistic development for the better, that, transcendentalist as he was by nature, so much so as to be in danger of lapsing into an Oriental mysticism, his habits of thought should have been made precise and his genius disciplined by a mind so severely logical as that of Aristotle. This does not conflict with what we believe to be equally true, that the Platonizing commentaries on his poem, like that of Landino, are the most satisfactory. Beside the prose already mentioned, we have a small collection of Dante's letters, the recovery of the larger number of which we owe to Professor Witte. They are all interesting, some of them especially so, as illustrating the prophetic character with which Dante invested himself. The longest is one addressed to Can Grande della Scala, explaining the intention of the "Commedia" and the method to be employed in its interpretation. The authenticity of this letter has been doubted, but is now generally admitted.

We shall barely allude to the minor poems, full of grace and depth of mystic sentiment, and which would have given Dante a high place in the history of Italian literature, even had he written nothing else. They are so abstract, however, that without the extrinsic interest of having been written by the author of the "Commedia," they would probably find few readers. All that is certainly known in regard to the "Commedia" is that it was composed during the nineteen years which intervened between Dante's banishment and death. Attempts have been made to fix precisely the dates of the different parts, but without success, and the differences of opinion are bewildering. Foscolo has constructed an ingenious and forcible argument to show that no part of the poem was published before the author's death. The question depends somewhat on the meaning we attach to the word "published." In an age of manuscript the wide dispersion of a poem so long even as a single one of the three divisions of the "Commedia" would be accomplished very slowly. But it is difficult to account for the great fame which Dante enjoyed during the latter years of his life, unless we suppose that parts, at least, of his greatest work had been read or heard by a large number of persons. This need not, however, imply publication; and Witte, whose opinion is entitled to great consideration, supposes

even the "Inferno" not to have been finished before 1314 or 1315. In a matter where certainty would be impossible, it is of little consequence to reproduce conjectural dates. In the letter to Can Grande, before alluded to, Dante himself has stated the theme of his song. He says that "the literal subject of the whole work is the state of the soul after death simply considered. But if the work be taken allegorically, the subject is man, as by merit or demerit, through freedom of the will, he renders himself liable to the reward or punishment of justice." He tells us that the work is to be interpreted in a literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical sense, a mode then commonly employed with the Scriptures,¹ and of which he gives the following example:—"To make which mode of treatment more clear, it may be applied in the following verses: *In exitu Israel de Aegypto, domus Jacob de populo barbaro, facta est Judaea sanctificatio ejus, Israel potestas ejus.*"² For if we look only at the literal sense, it signifies the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses; if at the allegorical, it signifies our redemption through Christ; if at the moral, it signifies the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to a state of grace; and if at the anagogical, it

¹ As by Dante himself in the *Convito*.

² Psalm cxiv. 1, 2.

signifies the passage of the blessed soul from the bondage of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory." A Latin couplet, cited by one of the old commentators, puts the matter compactly together for us : —

“ *Litera gesta refert; quid credas allegoria;
Moralis quid agas; quid speres anagogia.*”

Dante tells us that he calls his poem a comedy because it has a fortunate ending, and gives its title thus : “ Here begins the comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, but not in morals.”¹ The poem consists of three parts, “ Hell,” “ Purgatory,” and “ Paradise.” Each part is divided into thirty-three cantos, in allusion to the years of the Saviour’s life ; for though the “ Hell ” contains thirty-four, the first canto is merely introductory. In the form of the verse (triple rhyme) we may find an emblem of the Trinity, and in the three divisions, of the threefold state of man, sin, grace, and beatitude. Symbolic meanings reveal themselves, or make themselves suspected, everywhere, as in the architecture of the Middle Ages. An analysis of the poem would be out of place here, but we must say a few words of Dante’s position as respects modern literature. If we except Wolfram von Eschenbach, he is the first Christian poet,

¹ He commonly prefaced his letters with some such phrase as *exul immeritus*.

the first (indeed, we might say the only) one whose whole system of thought is colored in every finest fibre by a purely Christian theology. Lapse through sin, mediation, and redemption, these are the subjects of the three parts of the poem : or, otherwise stated, intellectual conviction of the result of sin, typified in Virgil (symbol also of that imperialism whose origin he sang) ; moral conversion after repentance, by divine grace, typified in Beatrice ; reconciliation with God, and actual blinding vision of him — “The pure in heart shall see God.” Here are general truths which any Christian may accept and find comfort in. But the poem comes nearer to us than this. It is the real history of a brother man, of a tempted, purified, and at last triumphant human soul ; it teaches the benign ministry of sorrow, and that the ladder of that faith by which man climbs to the actual fruition of things not seen *ex quovis ligno non fit*, but only of the cross manfully borne. The poem is also, in a very intimate sense, an apotheosis of woman. Indeed, as Marvell’s drop of dew mirrored the whole firmament, so we find in the “Commedia” the image of the Middle Ages ; and the sentimental gyniolatry of chivalry, which was at best but skin-deep, is lifted in Beatrice to an ideal and universal plane. It is the same with Catholicism, with imperialism, with the scholastic philosophy ; and nothing is more wonderful

than the power of absorption and assimilation in this man, who could take up into himself the world that then was, and reproduce it with such cosmopolitan truth to human nature and to his own individuality, as to reduce all contemporary history to a mere comment on his vision. We protest, therefore, against the parochial criticism which would degrade Dante to a mere partisan, which sees in him a Luther before his time, and would clap the *bonnet rouge* upon his heavenly muse.

Like all great artistic minds, Dante was essentially conservative, and, arriving precisely in that period of transition when Church and Empire were entering upon the modern epoch of thought, he strove to preserve both by presenting the theory of both in a pristine and ideal perfection. The whole nature of Dante was one of intense belief. There is proof upon proof that he believed himself invested with a divine mission. Like the Hebrew prophets, with whose writings his whole soul was imbued, it was back to the old worship and the God of the fathers that he called his people; and not Isaiah himself was more destitute of that humor, that sense of ludicrous contrast, which is an essential in the composition of a sceptic. In Dante's time, learning had something of a sacred character; the line was hardly yet drawn between the clerk and the possessor of supernatural powers; it was with

the next generation, with the elegant Petrarch, even more truly than with the kindly Boccaccio, that the purely literary life, and that dilettantism, which is the twin sister of scepticism, began. As a merely literary figure, the position of Dante is remarkable. Not only as respects thought, but as respects æsthetics also, his great poem stands as a monument on the boundary line between the ancient and modern. He not only marks, but is in himself, the transition. *Arma virumque cano*, that is the motto of classic song; the things of this world and great men. Dante says, *subjectum est homo*, not *vir*; my theme is man, not a man. The scene of the old epic and drama was in this world, and its catastrophe here; Dante lays his scene in the human soul, and his fifth act in the other world. He makes himself the protagonist of his own drama. In the "Commedia" for the first time Christianity wholly revolutionizes Art, and becomes its seminal principle. But æsthetically also, as well as morally, Dante stands between the old and the new, and reconciles them. The theme of his poem is purely subjective, modern, what is called romantic; but its treatment is objective (almost to realism, here and there), and it is limited by a form of classic severity. In the same way he sums up in himself the two schools of modern poetry which had preceded him, and, while essentially lyrical in his subject, is epic in

the handling of it. So also he combines the deeper and more abstract religious sentiment of the Teutonic races with the scientific precision and absolute systematism of the Romanic. In one respect Dante stands alone. While we can in some sort account for such representative men as Voltaire and Goethe (nay, even Shakespeare) by the intellectual and moral fermentation of the age in which they lived, Dante seems morally isolated and to have drawn his inspiration almost wholly from his own internal reserves. Of his mastery in style we need say little here. Of his mere language, nothing could be better than the expression of Rivarol: "His verse holds itself erect by the mere force of the substantive and verb, without the help of a single epithet." We will only add a word on what seems to us an extraordinary misapprehension of Coleridge, who disparages Dante by comparing his Lucifer with Milton's Satan. He seems to have forgotten that the precise measurements of Dante were not prosaic, but absolutely demanded by the nature of his poem. He is describing an actual journey, and his exactness makes a part of the verisimilitude. We read the "Paradise Lost" as a poem, the "Commedia" as a record of fact; and no one can read Dante without believing his story, for it is plain that he believed it himself. It is false æsthetics to confound the grandiose with the imaginative.

Milton's angels are not to be compared with Dante's, at once real and supernatural; and the Deity of Milton is a Calvinistic Zeus, while nothing in all poetry approaches the imaginative grandeur of Dante's vision of God at the conclusion of the "Paradiso." In all literary history there is no such figure as Dante, no such homogeneousness of life and works, such loyalty to ideas, such sublime irrecognition of the unessential; and there is no moral more touching than that the contemporary recognition of such a nature, so endowed and so faithful to its endowment, should be summed up in the sentence of Florence: *Igne comburatur sic quod moriatur.*¹

The range of Dante's influence is not less remarkable than its intensity. Minds, the antipodes of each other in temper and endowment, alike feel the force of his attraction, the perva-

¹ In order to fix more precisely in the mind the place of Dante in relation to the history of thought, literature, and events, we subjoin a few dates: Dante born, 1265; end of Crusades, death of St. Louis, 1270; Aquinas died, 1274; Bonaventura died, 1274; Giotto born, 1276; Albertus Magnus died, 1280; Sicilian Vespers, 1282; death of Ugolino and Francesca da Rimini, 1282; death of Beatrice, 1290; Roger Bacon died, 1292; death of Cimabue, 1302; Dante's banishment, 1302; Petrarch born, 1304; Fra Dolcino burned, 1307; Pope Clement V. at Avignon, 1309; Templars suppressed, 1312; Boccaccio born, 1313; Dante died, 1321; Wycliffe born, 1324; Chaucer born, 1328.

sive comfort of his light and warmth. Boccaccio and Lamennais are touched with the same reverential enthusiasm. The imaginative Ruskin is rapt by him, as we have seen, perhaps beyond the limit where critical appreciation merges in enthusiasm; and the matter-of-fact Schlosser tells us that "he, who was wont to contemplate earthly life wholly in an earthly light, has made use of Dante, Landino, and Vellutello in his solitude to bring a heavenly light into his inward life." Almost all other poets have their seasons, but Dante penetrates to the moral core of those who once fairly come within his sphere, and possesses them wholly. His readers turn students, his students zealots, and what was a taste becomes a religion. The homeless exile finds a home in thousands of grateful hearts: *E da esilio venne a questa pace.*

Every kind of objection, æsthetic and other, may be, and has been, made to the "Divina Commedia," especially by critics who have but a superficial acquaintance with it, or rather with the "Inferno," which is as far as most English critics go. Coleridge himself, who had a way of divining what was in books, may be justly suspected of not going further, though with Cary to help him. Mr. Carlyle, who has said admirable things of Dante the man, was very imperfectly read in Dante the author, or he would never have put Sordello in hell and the meeting

with Beatrice in paradise. In France it was not much better (though Rivarol has said the best thing hitherto of Dante's parsimony of epithet ¹) before Ozanam, who, if with decided ultramontane leanings, has written excellently well of our poet, and after careful study. Voltaire, though not without relentings toward a poet who had put popes heels upward in hell, regards him on the whole as a stupid monster and barbarian. It was no better in Italy, if we may trust Foscolo, who affirms that "neither Pelli nor others deservedly more celebrated than he ever read attentively the poem of Dante, perhaps never ran through it from the first verse to the last."² Accordingly we have heard that the "Commedia" was a sermon, a political pamphlet, the revengeful satire of a disappointed Ghibelline, nay, worse, of a turncoat Guelph. It is narrow, it is bigoted, it is savage, it is theological, it is mediæval, it is heretical, it is scholastic, it is obscure, it is pedantic, its Italian is not that of *la Crusca*,

¹ Rivarol characterized only a single quality of Dante's style, who knew how to spend as well as spare. Even the *Inferno*, on which he based his remark, might have put him on his guard. Dante understood very well the use of ornament in its fitting place. *Est enim exornatio alicujus convenientis additio*, he tells us in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (lib. II. cap. I.). His simile of the doves (*Inferno*, v. 82 et seq.), perhaps the most exquisite in all poetry, quite oversteps Rivarol's narrow limit of "substantive and verb."

² *Discorso sul testo*, ec., section xviii.

its ideas are not those of an enlightened eighteenth century, it is everything, in short, that a poem should not be ; and yet, singularly enough, the circle of its charm has widened in proportion as men have receded from the theories of Church and State which are supposed to be its foundation, and as the modes of thought of its author have become more alien to those of his readers. In spite of all objections, some of which are well founded, the "Commedia" remains one of the three or four universal books that have ever been written.

We may admit, with proper limitations, the modern distinction between the Artist and the Moralist. With the one Form is all in all, with the other Tendency. The aim of the one is to delight, of the other to convince. The one is master of his purpose, the other mastered by it. The whole range of perception and thought is valuable to the one as it will minister to imagination, to the other only as it is available for argument. With the moralist use is beauty, good only as it serves an ulterior purpose ; with the artist beauty is use, good in and for itself. In the fine arts the vehicle makes part of the thought, coalesces with it. The living conception shapes itself a body in marble, color, or modulated sound, and henceforth the two are inseparable. The results of the moralist pass into the intellectual atmosphere of mankind, it matters little

by what mode of conveyance. But where, as in Dante, the religious sentiment and the imagination are both organic, something interfused with the whole being of the man, so that they work in kindly sympathy, the moral will insensibly suffuse itself with beauty as a cloud with light. Then that fine sense of remote analogies, awake to the assonance between facts seemingly remote and unrelated, between the outward and inward worlds, though convinced that the things of this life are shadows, will be persuaded also that they are not fantastic merely, but imply a substance somewhere, and will love to set forth the beauty of the visible image because it suggests the ineffably higher charm of the unseen original. Dante's ideal of life, the enlightening and strengthening of that native instinct of the soul which leads it to strive backward toward its divine source, may subliminate the senses till each becomes a window for the light of truth and the splendor of God to shine through. In him as in Calderon the perpetual presence of imagination not only glorifies the philosophy of life and the science of theology, but idealizes both in symbols of material beauty. Though Dante's conception of the highest end of man was that he should climb through every phase of human experience to that transcendental and supersensual region where the true, the good, and the beautiful blend in the white light of God, yet

the prism of his imagination forever resolved the ray into color again, and he loved to show it also where, entangled and obstructed in matter, it became beautiful once more to the eye of sense. Speculation, he tells us, is the use, without any mixture, of our noblest part (the reason). And this part cannot in this life have its perfect use, which is to behold God (who is the highest object of the intellect), except inasmuch as the intellect considers and beholds him in his effects.¹ Underlying Dante the metaphysician, statesman, and theologian, was always Dante the poet,² irradiating and vivifying, gleaming through in a picturesque phrase, or touching things unexpectedly with that ideal light which softens and subdues like distance in the landscape. The stern outline of his system wavers and melts away before the eye of the reader in a mirage of

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. xxii.

² It is remarkable that when Dante, in 1297, as a preliminary condition to active politics, enrolled himself in the guild of physicians and apothecaries, he is qualified only with the title *poeta*. The arms of the Alighieri (curiously suitable to him who *sovrà gli altri come aquila vola*) were a wing of gold in a field of azure. His vivid sense of beauty even hovers sometimes like a *corposant* over the somewhat stiff lines of his Latin prose. For example, in his letter to the kings and princes of Italy on the coming of Henry VII. : "A new day brightens, revealing the dawn which already scatters the shades of long calamity; already the breezes of morning gather; *the lips of heaven are reddening!*"

imagination that lifts from beyond the sphere of vision and hangs in serener air images of infinite suggestion projected from worlds not realized, but substantial to faith, hope, and aspiration. Beyond the horizon of speculation floats, in the passionless splendor of the empyrean, the city of our God, the Rome whereof Christ is a Roman,¹ the citadel of refuge, even in this life, for souls purified by sorrow and self-denial, transhumanized² to the divine abstraction of pure contemplation. "And it is called Empyrean," he says in his letter to Can Grande, "which is the same as a heaven blazing with fire or ardor, not because there is in it a material fire or burning, but a spiritual one, which is blessed love or charity." But this splendor he bodies forth, if sometimes quaintly, yet always vividly and most often in types of winning grace.

Dante was a mystic with a very practical turn of mind. A Platonist by nature, an Aristotelian by training, his feet keep closely to the narrow path of dialectics, because he believed it the safest, while his eyes are fixed on the stars and his brain is busy with things not demonstrable, save by that grace of God which passeth all understanding, nor capable of being told unless by far-off hints and adumbrations. Though he himself has directly explained the

¹ *Purgatorio*, xxxii. 100.

² *Paradiso*, i. 70.

scope, the method, and the larger meaning of his greatest work,¹ though he has indirectly pointed out the way to its interpretation in the "Convito," and though everything he wrote is but an explanatory comment on his own character and opinions, unmistakably clear and precise, yet both man and poem continue not only to be misunderstood popularly, but also by such as should know better.² That those who confined their studies to the "Commedia" should have interpreted it variously is not wonderful, for out of the first or literal meaning others open, one out of another, each of wider circuit and purer abstraction, like Dante's own heavens, giving and receiving light.³ Indeed, Dante himself is partly to blame for this. "The form or mode of treatment," he says, "is poetic, fictive, descriptive, digressive, transumptive, and withal definitive, divisive, probative, impro-
bative, and positive of examples." Here are conundrums enough, to be sure! To Italians at home, for whom the great arenas of political

¹ In a letter to Can Grande (xi. of the *Epistolae*).

² Witte, Wegele, and Ruth in German, and Ozanam in French, have rendered ignorance of Dante inexcusable among men of culture.

³ *Inferno*, vii. 75. "Nay, his style," says Miss Rossetti, "is more than concise: it is elliptical, it is recondite. A first thought often lies coiled up and hidden under a second; the words which state the conclusion involve the premises and develop the subject." (p. 3.)

and religious speculation were closed, the temptation to find a subtler meaning than the real one was irresistible. Italians in exile, on the other hand, made Dante the stalking-horse from behind which they could take a long shot at Church and State, or at obscurer foes.¹ Infinitely touching and sacred to us is the instinct of intense sympathy which draws these latter toward their great forerunner, *exul immeritus* like themselves.² But they have too often wrung a meaning from Dante which is injurious to the man and out of keeping with the ideas of

¹ A complete vocabulary of Italian billingsgate might be selected from Biagioli. Or see the concluding pages of Nannucci's excellent tract, *Intorno alle voci usate da Dante*, Corfù, 1840. Even Foscolo could not always refrain. Dante should have taught them to shun such vulgarities. See *Inferno*, xxx. 131-148.

² "My Italy, my sweetest Italy, for having loved thee too much I have lost thee, and, perhaps, . . . ah, may God avert the omen! But more proud than sorrowful for an evil endured for thee alone, I continue to consecrate my vigils to thee alone. . . . An exile full of anguish, perchance, availed to sublime the more in thy Alighieri that lofty soul which was a beautiful gift of thy smiling sky; and an exile equally wearisome and undeserved now avails, perhaps, to sharpen my small genius so that it may penetrate into what he left written for thy instruction and for his glory." (Rossetti, *Disamina*, ec., p. 405.) Rossetti is himself a proof that a noble mind need not be narrowed by misfortune. His *Comment* (unhappily incomplete) is one of the most valuable and suggestive.

his age. The aim in expounding a great poem should be, not to discover an endless variety of meanings often contradictory, but whatever it has of great and perennial significance; for such it must have, or it would long ago have ceased to be living and operative, would long ago have taken refuge in the Chartreuse of great libraries, dumb thenceforth to all mankind. We do not mean to say that this minute exegesis is useless or unpraiseworthy, but only that it should be subsidiary to the larger way. It serves to bring out more clearly what is very wonderful in Dante, namely, the omnipresence of his memory throughout the work, so that its intimate coherence does not exist in spite of the reconditeness and complexity of allusion, but is woven out of them. The poem has many senses, he tells us, and there can be no doubt of it; but it has also, and this alone will account for its fascination, a living soul behind them all and informing all, an intense singleness of purpose, a core of doctrine simple, human, and wholesome, though it be also, to use his own phrase, the bread of angels.

Nor is this unity characteristic only of the "Divina Commedia." All the works of Dante, with the possible exception of the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" (which is unfinished), are component parts of a Whole Duty of Man mutually completing and interpreting one another. They are

also, as truly as Wordsworth's "Prelude," a history of the growth of a poet's mind. Like the English poet he valued himself at a high rate, the higher no doubt after Fortune had made him outwardly cheap. *Sempre il magnanimo si magnifica in suo cuore; e così lo pusillanimo per contrario sempre si tiene meno che non è.*¹ As in the prose of Milton, whose striking likeness to Dante in certain prominent features of character has been remarked by Foscolo, there are in Dante's minor works continual allusions to himself of great value as material for his biographer. Those who read attentively will discover that the tenderness he shows toward Francesca and her lover did not spring from any friendship for her family, but was a constant quality of his nature, and that what is called his revengeful ferocity is truly the implacable resentment of a lofty mind and a lover of good against evil, whether showing itself in private or public life; perhaps hating the former manifestation of it the most because he believed it to be the root of the latter, — a faith which those who have watched the course of politics in a democracy, as he had, will be inclined to share. His gentleness is all the more striking by contrast, like that silken compensation which blooms out of the thorny stem of

¹ The great-minded man ever magnifies himself in his heart, and in like manner the pusillanimous holds himself less than he is. (*Convito*, tratt. I. c. 11.)

the cactus. His moroseness,¹ his party spirit, and his personal vindictiveness are all predicated upon the "Inferno," and upon a misapprehension or careless reading even of that. Dante's zeal was not of that sentimental kind, quickly kindled and as soon quenched, that hovers on the surface of shallow minds, —

"Even as the flame of unctuous things is wont
To move upon the outer surface only";²

it was the steady heat of an inward fire kindling the whole character of the man through and through, like the minarets of his own city of Dis.³ He was, as seems distinctive in some degree of the Latinized races, an unflinching *a priori* logician, not unwilling to "syllogize invidious verities,"⁴ wherever they might lead him, like Sigier, whom he has put in paradise, though more than suspected of heterodoxy. But at the same time, as we shall see, he had something of the practical good sense of that Teutonic

¹ Dante's notion of virtue was not that of an ascetic, nor has any one ever painted her in colors more soft and splendid than he in the *Convito*. She is "sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes," and he dwells on the delights of her love with a rapture which kindles and purifies. So far from making her an inquisitor, he says expressly that she "should be glad some and not sullen in all her works." (*Convito*, tratt. i. c. 8.) "Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose"!

² *Inferno*, xix. 28, 29.

³ *Ibid.* viii. 70-75.

⁴ *Paradiso*, x. 138.

stock whence he drew a part of his blood, which prefers a malleable syllogism that can yield without breaking, to the inevitable but incalculable pressure of human nature and the stiffer logic of events. His theory of Church and State was not merely a fantastic one, but intended for the use and benefit of men as they were; and he allowed accordingly for aberrations, to which even the law of gravitation is forced to give place; how much more, then, any scheme whose very starting-point is the freedom of the will!

We are thankful for a commentator at last who passes dry-shod over the *turbide onde* of inappreciative criticism, and, quietly waving aside the thick atmosphere which has gathered about the character of Dante both as man and poet, opens for us his City of Doom with the divining-rod of reverential study. Miss Rossetti comes commended to our interest, not only as one of a family which seems to hold genius by the tenure of gavelkind, but as having a special claim by inheritance to a love and understanding of Dante. She writes English with a purity that has in it something of feminine softness with no lack of vigor or precision. Her lithe mind winds itself with surprising grace through the metaphysical and other intricacies of her subject. She brings to her work the refined enthusiasm of a cultivated woman and the penetration of sympathy. She has chosen the better way (in which

Germany took the lead) of interpreting Dante out of himself, the pure spring from which, and from which alone, he drew his inspiration, and not from muddy Fra Alberico or Abbate Giovacchino, from stupid visions of St. Paul or voyages of St. Brandan. She has written by far the best comment that has appeared in English, and we should say the best that has been done in England, were it not for her father's "*Comento Analitico*," for excepting which her filial piety will thank us. Students of Dante in the original will be grateful to her for many suggestive hints, and those who read him in English will find in her volume a travelling-map in which the principal points and their connections are clearly set down. In what we shall say of Dante we shall endeavor only to supplement her interpretation with such side-lights as may have been furnished us by twenty years of assiduous study. Dante's thought is multiform, and, like certain street-signs, once common, presents a different image according to the point of view. Let us consider briefly what was the plan of the "*Divina Commedia*" and Dante's aim in writing it, which, if not to justify, was at least to illustrate, for warning and example, the ways of God to man. The higher intention of the poem was to set forth the results of sin, or unwisdom, and of virtue, or wisdom, in this life, and consequently in the life to come, which is

but the continuation and fulfilment of this. The scene accordingly is the spiritual world, of which we are as truly denizens now as hereafter. The poem is a diary of the human soul in its journey upwards from error through repentance to atonement with God. To make it apprehensible by those whom it was meant to teach, nay, from its very nature as a poem, and not a treatise of abstract morality, it must set forth everything by means of sensible types and images.

“To speak thus is adapted to your mind,
 Since only through the sense it apprehendeth
 What then it worthy makes of intellect.
 On this account the Scripture condescends
 Unto your faculties, and feet and hands
 To God attributes, and means something else.”¹

Whoever has studied mediæval art in any of its branches need not be told that Dante's age was one that demanded very palpable and even revolting types. As in the old legend, a drop of scalding sweat from the damned soul must shrivel the very skin of those for whom he wrote, to make them wince if not to turn them away from evil-doing. To consider his hell a place of physical torture is to take Circe's herd for real swine. Its mouth yawns not only under Florence, but before the feet of every man everywhere who goeth about to do evil. His hell is a condition of the soul, and he could not find images loath-

¹ *Paradiso*, iv. 40-45 (Longfellow's version).

some enough to express the moral deformity which is wrought by sin on its victims, or his own abhorrence of it. Its inmates meet you in the street every day.

“Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place; for where we are is hell,
And where hell is there we must ever be.”¹

It is our own sensual eye that gives evil the appearance of good, and out of a crooked hag makes a bewitching siren. The reason enlightened by the grace of God sees it as it truly is, full of stench and corruption.² It is this office of reason which Dante undertakes to perform, by divine commission, in the “Inferno.” There can be no doubt that he looked upon himself as invested with the prophetic function, and the Hebrew forerunners, in whose society his soul sought consolation and sustainment, certainly set him no example of observing the conventions of good society in dealing with the enemies of God. Indeed, his notions of good society were not altogether those of this world in any generation. He would have defined it as meaning “the peers” of Philosophy, “souls free from wretched and vile delights and from vulgar

¹ Marlowe's *Faustus*. “Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell.” (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 75.) In the same way, *ogni dove in cielo è Paradiso*. (*Paradiso*, iii. 88, 89.)

² *Purgatorio*, xix. 7-33.

habits, endowed with genius and memory.”¹ Dante himself had precisely this endowment, and in a very surprising degree. His genius enabled him to see and to show what he saw to others; his memory neither forgot nor forgave. Very hateful to his fervid heart and sincere mind would have been the modern theory which deals with sin as involuntary error, and by shifting off the fault to the shoulders of Atavism or those of Society, personified for purposes of excuse, but escaping into impersonality again from the grasp of retribution, weakens that sense of personal responsibility which is the root of self-respect and the safeguard of character. Dante indeed saw clearly enough that the Divine justice did at length overtake Society in the ruin of states caused by the corruption of private, and thence of civic, morals; but a personality so intense as his could not be satisfied with such a tardy and generalized penalty as this. “It is Thou,” he says sternly, “who hast done this thing, and Thou, not Society, shalt be damned for it; nay, damned all the worse for this paltry subterfuge. This is not my judgment, but that of universal Nature² from before the beginning of the world.”³ Accordingly the highest reason, typified in his guide Virgil, rebukes him

¹ *Convito*, tratt. II. c. 16.

² *La natura universale, cioè Iddio*. (Ibid., tratt. III. c. 4.)

³ *Inferno*, III. 7, 8.

for bringing compassion to the judgments of God,¹ and again embraces him and calls the mother that bore him blessed, when he bids Filippo Argenti begone among the other dogs.² This latter case shocks our modern feelings the more rudely for the simple pathos with which Dante makes Argenti answer when asked who he was, "Thou seest I am one that weeps." It is also the one that makes most strongly for the theory of Dante's personal vindictiveness,³ and it may count for what it is worth. We are not

¹ *Inferno*, xx. 30. Mr. W. M. Rossetti strangely enough renders this verse "Who hath a passion for God's judgeship." *Compassion porta*, is the reading of the best texts, and Witte adopts it. Buti's comment is "*cioè porta pena e dolore di colui che giustamente è condannato da Dio che è sempre giusto.*" There is an analogous passage in *The Revelation of the Apostle Paul*, printed in the *Proceedings of the American Oriental Society* (vol. viii. pp. 213, 214): "And the angel answered and said, 'Wherefore dost thou weep? Why! art thou more merciful than God?' And I said, 'God forbid, O my lord; for God is good and long-suffering unto the sons of men, and he leaves every one of them to his own will, and he walks as he pleases.' " This is precisely Dante's view.

² *Ibid.* viii. 40.

³ "I following her (Moral Philosophy) in the work as well as the passion, so far as I could, abominated and disparaged the errors of men, not to the infamy and shame of the erring, but of the errors." (*Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 1.) "Wherefore in my judgment as he who defames a worthy man ought to be avoided by people and not listened to, so a vile man descended of worthy ancestors ought to be hunted out by all." (*Ibid.* tratt. iv. c. 29.)

greatly concerned to defend him on that score, for he believed in the righteous use of anger, and that baseness was its legitimate quarry. He did not think the Tweeds and Fisks, the political wire-pullers and convention-packers, of his day merely amusing, and he certainly did think it the duty of an upright and thoroughly trained citizen to speak out severely and unmistakably. He believed firmly, almost fiercely, in a divine order of the universe, a conception whereof had been vouchsafed him, and that whatever and whoever hindered or jostled it, whether wilfully or blindly it mattered not, was to be got out of the way at all hazards; because obedience to God's law, and not making things generally comfortable, was the highest duty of man, as it was also his only way to true felicity. It has been commonly assumed that Dante was a man soured by undeserved misfortune, that he took up a wholly new outfit of political opinions with his fallen fortunes, and that his theory of life and of man's relations to it was altogether reshaped for him by the bitter musings of his exile. This would be singular, to say the least, in a man who tells us that he "felt himself indeed four-square against the strokes of chance," and whose convictions were so intimate that they were not merely intellectual conclusions, but parts of his moral being. Fortunately we are called on to believe nothing of the kind. Dante himself has

supplied us with hints and dates which enable us to watch the germination and trace the growth of his double theory of government, applicable to man as he is a citizen of this world, and as he hopes to become hereafter a freeman of the celestial city. It would be of little consequence to show in which of two equally selfish and short-sighted parties a man enrolled himself six hundred years ago, but it is worth something to know that a man of ambitious temper and violent passions, aspiring to office in a city of factions, could rise to a level of principle so far above them all. Dante's opinions have life in them still, because they were drawn from living sources of reflection and experience, because they were reasoned out from the astronomic laws of history and ethics, and were not weather-guesses snatched in a glance at the doubtful political sky of the hour.

Swiftly the politic goes: is it dark? he borrows a lantern;
Slowly the statesman and sure, guiding his feet by the stars.

It will be well, then, to clear up the chronology of Dante's thought. When his ancestor Cacciaguida prophesies to him the life which is to be his after 1300,¹ he says, speaking of his exile:—

“ And that which most shall weigh upon thy shoulders
Will be the bad and foolish company
With which into this valley thou shalt fall;

¹ *Paradiso*, xvii. 61–69.

Of their bestiality their own proceedings
 Shall furnish proof; so 't will be well for thee
 A party to have made thee by thyself."

Here both context and grammatical construction (infallible guides in a writer so scrupulous and exact) imply irresistibly that Dante had become a party by himself before his exile. The measure adopted by the priors of Florence while he was one of them (with his assent and probably by his counsel), of sending to the frontier the leading men of both factions, confirms this implication. Among the persons thus removed from the opportunity of doing mischief was his dearest friend Guido Cavalcanti, to whom he had not long before addressed the "Vita Nuova."¹ Dante evidently looked back with satisfaction on his conduct at this time, and thought it both honest and patriotic, as it certainly was disinterested. "We whose country is the world, as the ocean to the fish," he tells us, "though we drank of the Arno in infancy, and love Florence so much that, *because we loved her, we suffer exile*

¹ It is worth mentioning that the sufferers in his *Inferno* are in like manner pretty exactly divided between the two parties. This is answer enough to the charge of partiality. He even puts persons there for whom he felt affection (as Brunetto Latini) and respect (as Farinata degli Uberti and Frederick II.). Till the French looked up their MSS., it was taken for granted that the *beccajo di Parigi* (*Purgatorio*, xx. 52) was a drop of Dante's gall. "Ce fu Huez Capez c'on apelle bouchier." (*Hugues Capet*, p. 1.)

unjustly, support the shoulders of our judgment rather upon reason than the senses.”¹ And again, speaking of old age, he says: “And the noble soul at this age blesses also the times past, and well may bless them, because, revolving them in memory, she recalls her righteous conduct, without which she could not enter the port to which she draws nigh, with so much riches and so great gain.” This language is not that of a man who regrets some former action as mistaken, still less of one who repented it for any disastrous consequences to himself. So, in justifying a man for speaking of himself, he alleges two examples, — that of Boethius, who did so to “clear himself of the perpetual infamy of his exile”; and that of Augustine, “for, by the process of his life, which was from bad to good, from good to better, and from better to best, he gave us example and teaching.”² After middle life, at least, Dante had that wisdom “whose use brings with it marvellous beauties, that is, contentment with every condition of time, and contempt of those things which others make their masters.”³ If Dante, moreover, wrote his treatise “*De Monarchia*” before 1302, and we think Witte’s inference⁴ from

¹ *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, lib. i. cap. vi. Cf. *Inferno*, xv. 61–64.

² *Convito*, tratt. i. c. 2.

³ *Ibid.* tratt. iii. c. 13.

⁴ *Opp. Min.* ed. Fraticelli, ii. pp. 281 and 283. Witte

its style and from the fact that he nowhere alludes to his banishment in it, conclusive on this point, then he was already a Ghibelline in the same larger and unpartisan sense which ever after distinguished him from his Italian contemporaries.

“Let, let the Ghibellines ply their handicraft
Beneath some other standard; for this ever
Ill follows he who it and justice parts,” —

he makes Justinian say, speaking of the Roman eagle.¹ His Ghibellinism, though undoubtedly the result of what he had seen of Italian misgovernment, embraced in its theoretical application the civilized world. His political system was one which his reason adopted, not for any temporary expediency, but because it conduced to justice, peace, and civilization, — the three conditions on which alone freedom was possible in any sense which made it worth having. Dante was intensely Italian, nay, intensely Florentine, but on all great questions he was, by the logical structure of his mind and its philosophic impartiality, incapable of intellectual provincialism.² If the circle of his affec-

is inclined to put it even earlier than 1300, and we believe he is right.

¹ *Paradiso*, vi. 103-105.

² Some Florentines have amusingly enough doubted the genuineness of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, because Dante therein denies the preëminence of the Tuscan dialect.

tions, as with persistent natures commonly, was narrow, his thought swept a broad horizon from that tower of absolute self which he had reared for its speculation. Even upon the principles of poetry, mechanical and other,¹ he had reflected more profoundly than most of those who criticise his work, and it was not by chance that he discovered the secret of that magical word too few, which not only distinguishes his verse from all other, but so strikingly from his own prose. He never took the bit of art² between

¹ See particularly the second book of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

² *Purgatorio*, xxxiii. 141. "That thing one calls beautiful whose parts answer to each other, because pleasure results from their harmony." (*Convito*, tratt. i. c. 5.) Carlyle says that "he knew too, partly, that his work was great, the greatest a man could do." He knew it fully. Telling us how Giotto's fame as a painter had eclipsed that of Cimabue, he takes an example from poetry also, and selecting two Italian poets, — one the most famous of his predecessors, the other of his contemporaries, — calmly sets himself above them both (*Purgatorio*, xi. 97-99), and gives the reason for his supremacy (*Purgatorio*, xxiv. 49-62). It is to be remembered that *Amore* in the latter passage does not mean love in the ordinary sense, but in that transcendental one set forth in the *Convito*, — that state of the soul which opens it for the descent of God's spirit, to make it over into his own image. "Therefore it is manifest that in this love the Divine virtue descends into men in the guise of an angel, . . . and it is to be noted that the descending of the virtue of one thing into another is nothing else than reducing it to its own likeness." (*Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 14.)

his teeth where only poetry, and not doctrine, was concerned.

If Dante's philosophy, on the one hand, was practical, a guide for the conduct of life, it was, on the other, a much more transcendent thing, whose body was wisdom, her soul love, and her efficient cause truth. It is a practice of wisdom from the mere love of it, for so we must interpret his *amoroso uso di sapienza*, when we remember how he has said before¹ that "the love of wisdom for its delight or profit is not true love of wisdom." And this love must embrace knowledge in all its branches, for Dante is content with nothing less than a pancratic training, and has a scorn of *dilettanti*, specialists, and quacks. "Wherefore none ought to be called a true philosopher who for any delight loves any part of knowledge, as there are many who delight in composing *canzoni*, and delight to be studious in them, and who delight to be studious in rhetoric and in music, and flee and abandon the other sciences which are all members of wisdom."² "Many love better to be held masters than to be so." With him wisdom is the generalization from many several knowledges of small account by themselves; it results therefore from breadth of culture, and would be impossible without it. Philosophy is a noble lady

¹ *Convito*, tratt. III. c. 12; *ibid.* c. 11.

² *Ibid.* tratt. III. c. 11.

(*donna gentil*¹), partaking of the divine essence by a kind of eternal marriage, while with other intelligences she is united in a less measure "as a mistress of whom no lover takes complete joy."² The eyes of this lady are her demonstrations, and her smile is her persuasion. "The eyes of wisdom are her demonstrations by which truth is beheld most certainly; and her smile is her persuasions in which the interior light of wisdom is shown under a certain veil, and in these two is felt that highest pleasure of beatitude which is the greatest good in paradise."³

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iii. *Canzone*, vv. 19-22. — This lady corresponds to Lucia (*Inferno*, ii. 97), the prevenient Grace, the *light* of God which shows the right path and guides the feet in it. With Dante God is always the sun, "which leadeth others right by every road." (*Inferno*, i. 18.) "The spiritual and intelligible Sun, which is God." (*Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 12.) His light "enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world," but his dwelling is in the heavens. He who wilfully deprives himself of this light is spiritually dead in sin. So when in Mars he beholds the glorified spirits of the martyrs he exclaims, "O Helios, who so arrayest them!" (*Paradiso*, xiv. 96.) Blanc (*Vocabolario, sub voce*) rejects this interpretation. But Dante, entering the abode of the Blessed, invokes the "good Apollo," and shortly after calls him *divina virtù*. We shall have more to say of this hereafter.

² *Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 12.

³ *Ibid.* tratt. iii. c. 15. Recalling how the eyes of Beatrice lift her servant through the heavenly spheres, and that smile of hers so often dwelt on with rapture, we see how Dante was in the habit of commenting and illustrating his own

"It is to be known that the beholding this lady was so largely ordained for us, not merely to look upon the face which she shows us, but that we may desire to attain the things which she keeps concealed. And as through her much thereof is seen by reason, so by her we believe that every miracle may have its reason in a higher intellect, and consequently may be. Whence our good faith has its origin, whence comes the hope of those unseen things which we desire, and through that the operation of charity, by the which three virtues we rise to philosophize in that celestial Athens where the Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans through the art of eternal truth accordingly concur in one will."¹

As to the double scope of Dante's philosophy we will cite a passage from the "*Convito*," all the more to our purpose as it will illustrate his own method of allegorizing. "Verily the use of our mind is double, that is, practical and

works. We must remember always that with him the allegorical exposition is the true one (*Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 1), the allegory being a truth which is hidden under a beautiful falsehood (ibid. tratt. ii. c. 1), and that Dante thought his poems without this exposition "under some shade of obscurity, so that to many their beauty was more grateful than their goodness" (ibid. tratt. i. c. 1), "because the goodness is in the meaning, and the beauty in the ornament of the words" (ibid. tratt. ii. c. 12).

¹ Ibid. tratt. iii. c. 14.

speculative, the one and the other most delightful, although that of contemplation be the more so. That of the practical is for us to act virtuously, that is, honorably, with prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. [These are the four stars seen by Dante, "Purgatorio," 1. 22, 27.] That of the speculative is not to act for ourselves, but to consider the works of God and Nature. . . . Verily of these uses one is more full of beatitude than the other, as it is the speculative, which without any admixture is the use of our noblest part. . . . And this part in this life cannot have its use perfectly, which is to see God, except inasmuch as the intellect considers him and beholds him through his effects. And that we should seek this beatitude as the highest, and not the other, the Gospel of Mark teaches us if we will look well. Mark says that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Mary Salome went to find the Saviour at the tomb and found him not, but found a youth clad in white who said to them, 'Ye seek the Saviour, and I say unto you that he is not here; and yet fear ye not, but go and say unto his disciples and Peter that he will go before them into Galilee, and there ye shall see him even as he told you.' By these three women may be understood the three sects of the active life, that is, the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Peripatetics, who go to the tomb, that is, to the present life,

which is a receptacle of things corruptible, and seek the Saviour, that is, beatitude, and find him not, but they find a youth in white raiment, who, according to the testimony of Matthew and the rest, was an angel of God. This angel is that nobleness of ours which comes from God, as hath been said, which speaks in our reason and says to each of these sects, that is, to whoever goes seeking beatitude in this life, that it is not here, but go and say to the disciples and to Peter, that is, to those who go seeking it and those who are gone astray (like Peter who had denied), that it will go before them into Galilee, that is, into speculation. Galilee is as much as to say Whiteness. Whiteness is a body full of corporeal light more than any other, and so contemplation is fuller of spiritual light than anything else here below. And he says, 'it will go before,' and does not say, 'it will be with you,' to give us to understand that God always goes before our contemplation, nor can we ever overtake here Him who is our supreme beatitude. And it is said, 'There ye shall see him as he told you,' that is, here ye shall have of his sweetness, that is, felicity, as is promised you here, that is, as it is ordained that ye can have. And thus it appears that we find our beatitude, this felicity of which we are speaking, first imperfect in the active life, that is, in the operations of the moral virtues, and afterwards well-nigh per-

fect in the operation of the intellectual ones, the which two operations are speedy and most direct ways to lead to the supreme beatitude, the which cannot be had here, as appears by what has been said." ¹

At first sight there may seem to be some want of agreement in what Dante says here of the soul's incapacity of the vision of God in this life with the triumphant conclusion of his own poem. But here as elsewhere Dante must be completed and explained by himself. "We must know that everything most greatly desires its own perfection, and in that its every desire is appeased, and by that everything is desired. [That is, the one is drawn toward, the other draws.] And this is that desire which makes every delight maimed, for no delight is so great in this life that it can take away from the soul this thirst so that desire remain not in the thought." "And ² since it is most natural to wish to be in God, the human soul naturally wills it with all longing. And since its being depends on God and is preserved thereby, it naturally desires and wills to be united with God in order to fortify its being. And since in the goodnesses of human nature is shown some reason for those of the Divine, it follows that the human soul unites itself in a spiritual way

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 22.

² *Ibid.* tratt. iii. c. 6.

with those so much the more strongly and quickly as they appear more perfect, and this appearance happens according as the knowledge of the soul is clear or impeded. And this union is what we call Love, whereby may be known what is within the soul, seeing those it outwardly loves. . . . And the human soul which is ennobled with the ultimate potency, that is, reason, participates in the Divine nature after the manner of an eternal Intelligence, because the soul is so ennobled and denuded of matter in that sovran potency that the Divine light shines in it as in an angel."¹ This union with God may therefore take place before the warfare of life is over, but is only possible for souls *perfettamente naturati*, perfectly endowed by nature.² This depends on the virtue of the generating soul and the concordant influence of the planets. "And if it happen that through the purity of the recipient soul, the intellectual virtue be well abstracted and absolved from every corporeal shadow, the Divine bounty is multiplied in it

¹ *Convito*, tratt. III. c. 2. By *potenzia* and *potenza* Dante means the faculty of receiving influences or impressions. (*Paradiso*, XIII. 61; XXIX. 34.) Reason is the "sovran potency" because it makes us capable of God.

² "O thou *well-born*, unto whom Grace concedes
To see the thrones of the Eternal triumph,
Or ever yet the warfare be abandoned."

(*Paradiso*, v. 115-118.)

as in a thing sufficient to receive the same.”¹

“And there are some who believe that if all the aforesaid virtues [powers] should unite for the production of a soul in their best disposition, so much of the Deity would descend into it that it would be almost another incarnate God.”²

Did Dante believe himself to be one of these? He certainly gives us reason to think so. He was born under fortunate stars, as he twice tells us,³ and he puts the middle of his own life at the thirty-fifth year, which is the period he assigns for it in the diviner sort of men.⁴

The stages of Dante's intellectual and moral growth may, we think, be reckoned with some approach to exactness from data supplied by himself. In the poems of the “Vita Nuova,” Beatrice, until her death, was to him simply a poetical ideal, a type of abstract beauty, chosen according to the fashion of the day after the manner of Provençal poets, but in a less carnal sense than theirs. “And by the fourth nature of animals, that is, the sensitive, man has another love whereby he loves according to sensible appearance, even as a beast. . . . And by the fifth and final nature, that is, the truly human, or, to speak better, angelic, that is, rational, man has

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 21.

² *Ibid.* tratt. iv. c. 21.

³ *Inferno*, xv. 55, 56; *Paradiso*, xxii. 112-117.

⁴ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 23 (cf. *Inferno*, i. 1).

a love for truth and virtue. . . . Wherefore, since this nature is called *mind*, I said that love discoursed in my mind to make it understood that this love was that which is born in the noblest of natures, that is, [the love] of truth and virtue, and *to shut out every false opinion by which it might be suspected that my love was for the delight of sense.*"¹ This is a very weighty affirmation, made, as it is, so deliberately by a man of Dante's veracity, who would and did speak truth at every hazard. Let us dismiss at once and forever all the idle tales of Dante's amours, of la Montanina, Gentucca, Pietra, Lisetta, and the rest, to that outer darkness of impure thoughts *là onde la stoltezza dipartille.*² We think Miss

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 3; *Paradiso*, xviii. 108-130.

² See an excellent discussion and elucidation of this matter by Witte, who so highly deserves the gratitude of all students of Dante, in *Dante Alighieri's Lyrische Gedichte*, theil ii. pp. 48-57. It was kindly old Boccaccio, who, without thinking any harm, first set this nonsense a-going. His *Life of Dante* is mainly a rhetorical exercise. After making Dante's marriage an excuse for revamping all the old slanders against matrimony, he adds gravely, "Certainly I do not affirm these things to have happened to Dante, for I do not know it, though it be true that (whether things like these or others were the cause of it), once parted from her, he would never come where she was nor suffer her to come where he was, for all that she was the mother of several children by him." That he did not come to her is not wonderful, for he would have been burned alive if he had. Dante could not send for her because he was a homeless wanderer. She remained in

Rossetti a little hasty in allowing that in the years which immediately followed Beatrice's death Dante gave himself up "more or less to sensual gratification and earthly aim." The earthly aim we in a certain sense admit; the sensual gratification we reject as utterly inconsistent, not only with Dante's principles, but with his character and indefatigable industry. Miss Rossetti illustrates her position by a subtle remark on "the lulling spell of an intellectual and sensitive delight in good running parallel with a voluntary and actual indulgence in evil." The dead Beatrice beckoned him toward the life of contemplation, and it was precisely during this period that he attempted to find happiness in the life of action. "Verily it is to be known that we may in this life have two felicities,

Florence with her children because she had powerful relations and perhaps property there. It is plain, also, that what Boccaccio says of Dante's *lussuria* had no better foundation. It gave him a chance to turn a period. He gives no particulars, and his general statement is simply incredible. Lionardo Bruni and Vellutello long ago pointed out the trifling and fictitious character of this *Life*. Those familiar with Dante's allegorical diction will not lay much stress on the literal meaning of *pargoletta* in *Purgatorio*, xxxi. 59. Gentucca, of course, was a real person, one of those who had shown hospitality to the exile. Dante remembers them all somewhere, for gratitude (which is quite as rare as genius) was one of the virtues of his unforgetting nature. Boccaccio's *Comment* is later and far more valuable than the *Life*.

following two ways, good and best, which lead us thither. The one is the active, the other the contemplative life, the which (though by the active we may attain, as has been said, unto good felicity) leads us to the best felicity and blessedness."¹ "The life of my heart, that is, of my inward self, was wont to be a sweet thought which went many times to the feet of God, that is to say, in thought I contemplated the kingdom of the Blessed. And I tell the final cause why I mounted thither in thought when I say, 'Where it [the sweet thought] beheld a lady in glory,' that I might make it understood that I was and am certain, by *her gracious revelation, that she was in heaven* (not on earth, as I had vainly imagined), whither I went in thought, so often as was possible to me, as it were rapt."² This passage exactly answers to another in "Purgatorio," xxx. 109-138:—

"Not only by the work of those great wheels
That destine every seed unto some end,
According as the stars are in conjunction,
But by the largess of celestial graces,

.

Such had this man become in his New Life
Potentially, that every righteous habit
Would have made admirable proof in him;

.

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 17; *Purgatorio*, xxvii. 100-108.

² *Convito*, tratt. ii. c. 8.

Some time did I sustain him with my look (*volto*);
 Revealing unto him my youthful eyes,
 I led him with me turned in the right way.
 As soon as ever of my second age
 I was upon the threshold and changed life,
 Himself from me he took and gave to others.
 When from the flesh to spirit I ascended,
 And beauty and virtue were in me increased,
 I was to him less dear and less delightful;
 And into ways untrue he turned his steps,
 Pursuing the false images of good,
 That never any promises fulfil¹
 Nor prayer for inspiration me availed,²
By means of which in dreams and otherwise
I called him back, so little did he heed them.
 So low he fell, that all appliances
 For his salvation were already short,
 Save showing him the people of perdition."

Now Dante himself, we think, gives us the clue, by following which we may reconcile the contradiction, what Miss Rossetti calls "the astounding discrepancy," between the Lady of the "Vita Nuova" who made him unfaithful to Beatrice, and the same Lady in the "Convito," who in attributes is identical with Beatrice herself. We must remember that the prose part

¹ That is, *wholly* fulfil, *rendono intera*.

² We should prefer here —

"Nor inspirations *won by prayer* availed" —

as better expressing *Nè l'impetrare spirazion*. Mr. Longfellow's translation is so admirable for its exactness as well as its beauty that it may be thankful for the minutest criticism, such only being possible.

of the "Convito," which is a comment on the "Canzoni," was written after the "Canzoni" themselves. How long after we cannot say with certainty, but it was plainly composed at intervals, a part of it probably after Dante had entered upon old age (which began, as he tells us, with the forty-fifth year), consequently after 1310. Dante had then written a considerable part of the "Divina Commedia" in which Beatrice was to go through her final and most ethereal transformation in his mind and memory. We say in his memory, for such idealizations have a very subtle retrospective action, and the new condition of feeling or thought is uneasy till it has half unconsciously brought into harmony whatever is inconsistent with it in the past. The inward life unwillingly admits any break in its continuity, and nothing is more common than to hear a man, in venting an opinion taken up a week ago, say with perfect sincerity, "I have always thought so and so." Whatever belief occupies the whole mind soon produces the impression on us of having long had possession of it, and one mode of consciousness blends so insensibly with another that it is impossible to mark by an exact line where one begins and the other ends. Dante in his exposition of the "Canzoni" must have been subject to this subtlest and most deceitful of influences. He would try to reconcile so far as he conscien-

tiously could his present with his past. This he could do by means of the allegorical interpretation. "For it would be a great shame to him," he says in the "Vita Nuova," "who should poetize something under the vesture of some figure or rhetorical color, and afterwards, when asked, could not strip his words of that vesture in such wise that they should have a true meaning." Now in the literal exposition of the "Canzone" beginning, "Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete,"¹ he tells us that the *grandezza* of the *Donna Gentil* was "temporal greatness" (one certainly of the felicities attainable by way of the *vita attiva*), and immediately after gives us a hint by which we may comprehend why a proud² man might covet it. "How much wisdom and how great a persistence in virtue (*abito virtuoso*) are hidden for want of this lustre!"³ When Dante reaches the Terrestrial Paradise⁴ which is the highest felicity of this world, and therefore the consummation of the Active Life, he is welcomed by a Lady who is its symbol, —

"Who went along
Singing and culling floweret after floweret," —

¹ Which he cites in the *Paradiso*, viii. 37.

² Dante confesses his guiltiness of the sin of pride, which (as appears by the examples he gives of it) included ambition, in *Purgatorio*, xiii. 136, 137.

³ *Convito*, tratt. ii. c. 11.

⁴ *Purgatorio*, xxviii.

and warming herself in the rays of Love, or "actual speculation," that is, "where love makes its peace felt."¹ That she was the symbol of this is evident from the previous dream of Dante,² in which he sees Leah, the universally accepted type of it, —

" Walking in a meadow,
Gathering flowers; and singing she was saying,
Know whosoever may my name demand
That I am Leah, and go moving round
My beauteous hands to make myself a garland,"' —

that is to say, of good works. She, having "washed him thoroughly from sin,"³ —

" All dripping brought
Into the dance of the four beautiful,"⁴ —

who are the intellectual virtues Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, the four stars, guides of the Practical Life, which he had seen when he came out of the Hell where he had beheld the results of sin, and arrived at the foot of the Mount of Purification. That these were the special virtues of practical goodness Dante

¹ *Purgatorio*, xxviii. 40-44; *Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 13.

² *Purgatorio*, xxvii. 94-105.

³ Psalm li. 2. "And therefore I say that her [Philosophy's] beauty, that is, morality, rains flames of fire, that is, a righteous appetite which is generated in the love of moral doctrine, the which appetite removes us from the natural as well as other vices." (*Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 15.)

⁴ *Purgatorio*, xxxi. 103, 104.

had already told us in a passage before quoted from the "Convito."¹ That this was Dante's meaning is confirmed by what Beatrice says to him,² —

"Short while shalt thou be here a forester (*silvano*)
And thou shalt be with me forevermore
A citizen of that Rome where Christ is Roman";

for by a "forest" he always means the world of life and action.³ At the time when Dante was writing the "Canzoni," on which the "Convito" was a comment, he believed science to be the "ultimate perfection itself, and not the way to it,"⁴ but before the "Convito" was composed he had become aware of a higher and purer light, an inward light, in that Beatrice, already clarified well-nigh to a mere image of the mind, "who lives in heaven with the angels, and on earth with my soul."⁵

So spiritually does Dante always present Beatrice to us, even where most corporeal, as in the "Vita Nuova," that many, like Biscione and Rossetti, have doubted her real existence. But surely we must consent to believe that she who speaks of

"The fair limbs wherein
I was enclosed, which scattered are in earth" —

¹ Tratt. iv. c. 22.

² *Purgatorio*, xxxii. 100-102.

³ Such is the *selva oscura* (*Inferno*, i. 2), such the *selva erronea di questa vita* (*Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 24).

⁴ *Convito*, tratt. i. c. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.* tratt. ii. c. 2.

was once a creature of flesh and blood, —

“ A creature not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food.”

When she died, Dante's grief, like that of Constance, filled her room up with something fairer than the reality had ever been. There is no idealizer like unavailing regret, all the more if it be a regret of fancy as much as of real feeling. She early began to undergo that change into something rich and strange in the sea¹ of his mind which so completely supernaturalized her at last. It is not impossible, we think, to follow the process of transformation. During the period of the “Convito Canzoni,” when he had so given himself to study that to his weakened eyes “the stars were shadowed with a white blur,”² this star of his imagination was eclipsed for a time with the rest. As his love had never been of the senses (which is bestial³), so his sorrow was all the more ready to be irradiated with celestial light, and to assume her to be the transmitter of it who had first awakened in him the nobler impulses of his nature, —

(“Such had this man become in his New Life
Potentially”), —

¹ *Mar di tutto il senno*, he calls Virgil (*Inferno*, viii. 7). Those familiar with his own works will think the phrase singularly applicable to himself.

² *Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 9.

³ *Ibid.* tratt. iii. c. 3.

and given him the first hints of a higher, nay, of the highest good. With that turn for double meaning and abstraction which was so strong in him, her very name helped him to allegorize her into one who makes blessed (*beat*), and thence the step was a short one to personify in her that Theosophy which enables man to see God and to be mystically united with him even in the flesh. Already, in the "Vita Nuova,"¹ she appears to him as afterwards in the Terrestrial Paradise, clad in that color of flame which belongs to the seraphim who contemplate God in himself, simply, and not in his relation to the Son or the Holy Spirit.² When misfortune came upon him, when his schemes of worldly activity failed, and science was helpless to console, as it had never been able wholly to satisfy, she already rose before him as the lost ideal of his youth, reproaching him with his desertion of purely spiritual aims. It is, perhaps, in allusion to this that he fixes the date of her death with such minute precision on the 9th June, 1290, most probably his own twenty-fifth birthday, on which he passed the boundary of adolescence.³

¹ *Vita Nuova*, xl.

² *Convito*, tratt. ii. c. 6.

³ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 24. The date of Dante's birth is uncertain, but the period he assigns for it (*Paradiso*, xxii. 112-117) extends from the middle of May to the middle of June. If we understand Buti's astrological comment, the day should fall in June rather than May.

That there should seem to be a discrepancy between the Lady of the "Vita Nuova" and her of the "Convito," Dante himself was already aware when writing the former and commenting it. Explaining the sonnet beginning *Gentil pensier*, he says, "In this sonnet I make two parts of myself according as my thoughts were divided in two. The one part I call *heart*, that is, the appetite, the other *soul*, that is, reason. . . . It is true that in the preceding sonnet I take side with the heart against the eyes [which were weeping for the lost Beatrice], and that appears contrary to what I say in the present one ; and therefore I say that in that sonnet also I mean by my *heart* the appetite, because my desire to remember me of my most gentle Lady was still greater than to behold this one, albeit I had already some appetite for her, but slight as should seem : whence it appears that the one saying is not contrary to the other." ¹ When, therefore, Dante speaks of the love of this Lady as the "adversary of *Reason*," he uses the word in its highest sense, not as understanding (*Intellectus*), but as synonymous with *soul*. Already, when the latter part of the "Vita Nuova," nay, perhaps the whole of the explanatory portion of it, was written, the plan of the

¹ *Vita Nuova*, xxxix. Compare for a different view, *The New Life of Dante*, an Essay with Translations, by C. E. Norton, pp. 92 et seq.

"Commedia" was complete, a poem the higher aim of which was to keep the soul alive both in this world and for the next. As Dante tells us, the contradiction in his mind was, though he did not become aware of it till afterwards, more apparent than real. He sought consolation in study, and, failing to find it in Learning (*scienza*), he was led to seek it in Wisdom (*sapienza*), which is the love of God and the knowledge of him.¹ He had sought happiness through the

¹ There is a passage in the *Convito* (tratt. III. c. 15) in which Dante seems clearly to make the distinction asserted above, "And therefore the desire of man is limited in this life to that *knowledge* (*scienza*) which may here be had, and passes not save by error that point which is beyond our natural understanding. And so is limited and measured in the angelic nature the amount of that *wisdom* which the nature of each is capable of receiving." Man is, according to Dante, superior to the angels in this, that he is capable both of reason and contemplation, while they are confined to the latter. That Beatrice's reproaches refer to no human *pargoletta*, the context shows, where Dante asks, —

"But wherefore so beyond my power of sight
Soars your desirable discourse, that aye
The more I strive, so much the more I lose it?
'That thou mayst recognize,' she said, 'the school
Which thou hast followed, and mayst see how far
Its doctrine follows after my discourse,
And mayst behold your path from the divine
Distant as far as separated is
From earth the heaven that highest hastens on.' "

(*Purgatorio*, xxxiii. 82-90.)

The *pargoletta* in its ordinary sense was necessary to the literal and human meaning, but it is shockingly discordant with

understanding; he was to find it through intuition. The lady Philosophy (according as she is moral or intellectual) includes both. Her gradual transfiguration is exemplified in passages already quoted. The active life leads indirectly by a knowledge of its failures and sins ("Inferno"), or directly by a righteous employment of it ("Purgatorio"), to the same end. The use of the sciences is to induce in us the ultimate perfection, that of speculating upon truth; the use of the highest of them, theology, the contemplation of God.¹ To this they all lead up. In one of those curious chapters of the "Convito,"² where he points out the analogy between the sciences and the heavens, Dante tells us that he compares moral philosophy with the crystalline heaven or *Primum Mobile*, because it communicates life and gives motion to all the others below it. But what gives motion to the crystalline heaven (Moral Philosophy) itself? "The most fervent appetite which it has in each of its parts to be conjoined with each part of that most divine quiet heaven" (Theology).³ Theo-

that non-natural interpretation which, according to Dante's repeated statement, lays open the true and divine meaning.

¹ "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." (Romans viii. 8, 9.)

² *Convito*, tratt. II. c. 14, 15.

³ *Ibid.* tratt. II. c. 4. Cf. *Paradiso*, I. 76, 77.

logy, the divine science, corresponds with the Empyrean, "because of its peace, the which, through the most excellent certainty of its subject, which is God, suffers no strife of opinions or sophistic arguments."¹ No one of the heavens is at rest but this, and in none of the inferior sciences can we find repose, though he likens physics to the heaven of the fixed stars, in whose name is a suggestion of the certitude to be arrived at in things demonstrable. Dante had this comparison in mind, it may be inferred, when he said, —

"Well I perceive that never sated is
 Our intellect unless the Truth illumine it
 Beyond which nothing true² expands itself.
 It rests therein as wild beast in his lair,
 When it attains it; and it can attain it;
 If not, then each desire would frustrate be.
 Therefore springs up, in fashion of a shoot,
 Doubt at the foot of truth; and this is nature,
 Which to the top from height to height impels us."³

The contradiction, as it seems to us, resolves itself into an essential, easily apprehensible, if mystical, unity. Dante at first gave himself to the study of the sciences (after he had lost the simple, unquestioning faith of youth) as the means of arriving at certainty. From the root

¹ "Vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called." (1 Tim. vi. 20.)

² That is, no partial truth.

³ *Paradiso*, IV. 124-132.

of every truth to which he attained sprang this sucker (*rampollo*) of doubt, drawing out of it the very sap of its life. In this way was Philosophy truly an adversary of his soul, and the reason of his remorse for fruitless studies which drew him away from the one that alone was and could be fruitful is obvious enough. But by and by out of the very doubt came the sweetness¹ of a higher and truer insight. He became aware that there were "things in heaven and earth undreamt of in your philosophy," as another doubter said, who had just finished *his* studies, but could not find his way out of the scepticism they engendered as Dante did.

"Insane is he who hopeth that our reason
 Can traverse the illimitable way,
 Which the one Substance in three Persons follows !
 Mortals, remain contented at the *Quia*;
 For if ye had been able to see all,
 No need there were [had been] for Mary to give birth.
 And ye have seen desiring without fruit
 Those whose desire would have been quieted,
 Which evermore is given them for a grief.
 I speak of Aristotle and of Plato
 And others many." ²

¹ "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judges xiv. 14.)

² *Purgatorio*, III. 34-44. The allusions in this passage are all to sayings of St. Paul, of whom Dante was plainly a loving reader. "Remain contented at the *Quia*," that is, be satisfied with knowing *that* things are, without inquiring too nicely *how* or *why*. "Being justified by faith we have peace

Whether at the time when the poems of the "Vita Nuova" were written, the Lady who withdrew him for a while from Beatrice was (which we doubt) a person of flesh and blood or not, she was no longer so when the prose narrative was composed. Any one familiar with Dante's double meanings will hardly question that by putting her at a window, which is a

with God" (Rom. v. 1). *Infinita via*: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. xi. 33.) *Aristotle and Plato*: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. . . . For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that *they are without excuse*. Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom i. 18-21). He refers to the Greeks. The Epistle to the Romans, by the way, would naturally be Dante's favorite. As St. Paul made the Law, so he would make Science, "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. iii. 24). He puts Aristotle and Plato in his *Inferno*, because they did not "adore God duly" (*Inferno*, iv. 38), that is, they "held the truth in unrighteousness." Yet he calls Aristotle "the master and guide of human reason" (*Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 6), and Plato "a most excellent man" (*Ibid.* tratt. ii. c. 5). Plato and Aristotle, like all Dante's figures, are types. We must disengage our thought from the individual, and fix it on the genus.

place to look out of, he intended to imply that she personified Speculation, a word which he uses with a wide range of meaning, sometimes as *looking for*, sometimes as *seeing* (like Shakespeare's

"There is no *speculation* in those eyes"),

sometimes as *intuition*, or the beholding all things in God, who is the cause of all. This is so obvious, and the image in this sense so familiar, that we are surprised it should have been hitherto unremarked. It is plain that, even when the "Vita Nuova" was written, the Lady was already Philosophy, but philosophy applied to a lower range of thought, not yet ascended from flesh to spirit. The Lady who seduced him was the science which looks for truth in second causes, or even in effects, instead of seeking it, where alone it can be found, in the First Cause; she was the Philosophy which looks for happiness in the visible world (of shadows), and not in the spiritual (and therefore substantial) world. The guerdon of his search was doubt. But Dante, as we have seen, made his very doubts help him upward toward certainty; each became a round in the ladder by which he climbed to clearer and clearer vision till the end.¹ Philosophy had made him forget

¹ It is to be remembered that Dante has typified the same thing when he describes how Reason (Virgil) first carries

Beatrice; it was Philosophy who was to bring him back to her again, washed clean in that very stream of forgetfulness that had made an impassable barrier between them.¹ Dante had known how to find in her the gift of Achilles's lance, —

“ Which used to be the cause
First of a sad and then a gracious boon.”²

There is another possible, and even probable, theory which would reconcile the Beatrice of the “Purgatorio” with her of the “Vita

him down by clinging to the fell of Satan, and then in the same way upwards again *a riveder le stelle*. Satan is the symbol of materialism, fixed at the point

“ To which things heavy draw from every side ”; —

as God is Light and Warmth, so is he “cold obstruction”; the very effort which he makes to rise by the motion of his wings begets the chilly blast that freezes him more immovably in his place of doom. The danger of all science save the highest (theology) was that it led to materialism. There appears to have been a great deal of it in Florence in the time of Dante. Its followers called themselves Epicureans, and burn in living tombs (*Inferno*, x.). Dante held them in special horror. “Of all bestialities that is the most foolish and vile and hurtful which believes there is no other life after this.” “And I so believe, so affirm, and so am certain that we pass to another better life after this” (*Convito*, tratt. ii. c. 9). It is a fine divination of Carlyle from the *Non han speranza di morte* that “one day it had risen sternly benign in the scathed heart of Dante that he, wretched, never resting, worn as he was, would [should] full surely die.”

¹ *Purgatorio*, xxxi. 103.

² *Inferno*, xxxi. 5, 6.

Nuova." Suppose that even in the latter she signified Theology, or at least some influence that turned his thoughts to God? Pietro di Dante, commenting the *pargoletta* passage in the "Purgatorio," says expressly that the poet had at one time given himself to the study of theology and deserted it for poesy and other mundane sciences. This must refer to a period beginning before 1290. Again, there is an early tradition that Dante in his youth had been a novice in a Franciscan convent, but never took the vows. Buti affirms this expressly in his comment on "Inferno," xvi. 106-123. It is perhaps slightly confirmed by what Dante says in the "Convito,"¹ that "one can not only turn to Religion by making himself like in habit and life to St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Francis, and St. Dominic, but likewise one may turn to good and true religion in a state of matrimony, for God wills no religion in us but of the heart." If he had ever thought of taking monastic vows, his marriage would have cut short any such intention. If he ever wished to wed the real Beatrice Portinari, and was disappointed, might not this be the time when his thoughts took that direction? If so, the impulse came indirectly, at least, from her.

We have admitted that Beatrice Portinari was a real creature, —

¹ Tratt. iv. c. 28.

“Col sangue suo e con le sue giunture”;—

but *how* real she was, and whether as real to the poet's memory as to his imagination, may fairly be questioned. She shifts, as the controlling emotion or the poetic fitness of the moment dictates, from a woman loved and lost to a gracious exhalation of all that is fairest in womanhood or most divine in the soul of man, and ere the eye has defined the new image it has become the old one again, or another mingled of both.

“Nor one nor other seemed now what he was;
E'en as proceedeth on before the flame
Upward along the paper a brown color,
Which is not black as yet, and the white dies.”¹

As the mystic Griffin in the eyes of Beatrice
(her demonstrations), so she in his own, —

“Now with the one, now with the other nature;
Think, Reader, if within myself I marvelled
When I beheld the thing itself stand still
And in its image it transformed itself.”²

At the very moment when she had undergone her most sublimated allegorical evaporation, his instinct as poet, which never failed him, realized her into woman again in those scenes of almost unapproached pathos which make the climax of his “Purgatorio.” The

¹ *Inferno*, xxv. 64-67.

² *Purgatorio*, xxxi. 123-126.

verses tremble with feeling and shine with tears.¹ Beatrice recalls her own beauty with a pride as natural as that of Fair Annie in the old ballad, and compares herself as advantageously with the "brown, brown bride" who had supplanted her. If this be a ghost, we do not need be told that she is a woman still.² We must

¹ Spenser, who had, like Dante, a Platonizing side, and who was probably the first English poet since Chaucer that had read the *Commedia*, has imitated the pictorial part of these passages in the *Faery Queen* (bk. vi. c. 10). He has turned it into a compliment, and a very beautiful one, to a living mistress. It is instructive to compare the effect of his purely sensuous verses with that of Dante's, which have such a wonderful reach behind them. They are singularly pleasing, but they do not stay by us as those of his model had done by him. Spenser was, as Milton called him, a "sage and serious poet"; he would be the last to take offence if we draw from him a moral not without its use now that Priapus is trying to persuade us that pose and drapery will make him as good as Urania. Better far the naked nastiness; the more covert the indecency, the more it shocks. Poor old god of gardens! Innocent as a clownish symbol, he is simply disgusting as an ideal of art. In the last century, they set him up in Germany and in France as befitting an era of enlightenment, the light of which came too manifestly from the wrong quarter to be long enduring.

² This touch of nature recalls another. The Italians claim humor for Dante. We have never been able to find it, unless it be in that passage (*Inferno*, xv. 119) where Brunetto Latini lingers under the burning shower to recommend his Tesoro to his former pupil. There is a comical touch of nature in an author's solicitude for his little work, not, as in

remember, however, that Beatrice had to be real that she might be interesting, to be beautiful that her goodness might be persuasive, nay, to be beautiful at any rate, because beauty has also something in it of divine. Dante has told, in a passage already quoted, that he would rather his readers should find his doctrine sweet than his verses, but he had his relentings from this Stoicism.

Fielding's case, after *its*, but his own damnation. We are not sure, but we fancy we catch the momentary flicker of a smile across those serious eyes of Dante's. There is something like humor in the opening verses of *Paradiso*, xvi., where Dante tells us how even in heaven he could not help glorying in being gently born, — he who had devoted a canzone and a book of the *Convito* to proving that nobility consisted wholly in virtue. But there is, after all, something touchingly natural in the feeling. Dante, unjustly robbed of his property, and with it of the independence so dear to him, seeing

“ Needy nothings trimmed in jollity,
And captive Good attending Captain Ill,” —

would naturally fall back on a distinction which money could neither buy nor replace. There is a curious passage in the *Convito* which shows how bitterly he resented his undeserved poverty. He tells us that buried treasure commonly revealed itself to the bad rather than the good. “ Verily I saw the place on the flanks of a mountain in Tuscany called Falterona, where the basest peasant of the whole countryside digging found there more than a bushel of pieces of the finest silver, which perhaps had awaited him more than a thousand years.” (Tratt. iv. c. 11.) One can see the grimness of his face as he looked and thought, “ how salt a savor hath the bread of others ! ”

“ Canzone, I believe those will be rare
 Who of thine inner sense can master all,
 Such toil it costs thy native tongue to learn;
 Wherefore, if ever it perchance befall
 That thou in presence of such men shouldst fare
 As seem not skilled thy meaning to discern,
 I pray thee then thy grief to comfort turn,
 Saying to them, ‘ O thou my new delight,
 Take heed at least how fair I am to sight.’ ”¹

We believe all Dante's other Ladies to have been as purely imaginary as the Dulcinea of Don Quixote; useful only as *motives*, but a real Beatrice is as essential to the human sympathies of the “ Divina Commedia ” as her glorified Idea to its allegorical teaching, and this Dante understood perfectly well.² Take *her* out of the poem, and the heart of it goes with her; take out her ideal, and it is emptied of its soul. She is the menstruum in which letter and spirit dissolve and mingle into unity. Those who doubt her existence must find Dante's graceful sonnet³ to Guido Cavalcanti as provoking as Sancho's story of his having seen Dulcinea winnowing wheat

¹ L'Envoi of canzone xiv. of the *Canzoniere*, 1. of the *Convito*. Dante cites the first verse of this canzone, *Paradiso*, viii. 37.

² How Dante himself could allegorize even historical personages may be seen in a curious passage of the *Convito* (tratt. iv. c. 28), where, commenting on a passage of Lucan, he treats Marcia and Cato as mere figures of speech.

³ *Canzoniere*, II. See Fraticelli's preface.

was to his master, "so alien is it from all that which eminent persons, who are constituted and preserved for other exercises and entertainments, do and ought to do."¹ But we should always remember in reading Dante that with him the allegorical interpretation is the true one (*verace sposizione*), and that he represents himself (and that at a time when he was known to the world only by his minor poems) as having made righteousness (*rettitudine*, in other words, moral philosophy) the subject of his verse.² Love with him seems first to have meant the love of truth and the search after it (*speculazione*), and afterwards the contemplation of it in its infinite source (*speculazione* in its higher and mystical sense). This is the divine love "which where it shines darkens and well-nigh extinguishes all other loves."³ Wisdom is the object of it, and

¹ *Don Quixote*, part II. c. viii.

² *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, I. ii. c. 2. He says the same of Giraud de Borneil, many of whose poems are moral and even devotional. See, particularly, "Al honor Dieu torn en mon chan" (Raynouard, *Lex. Rom.* I. 388), "Ben es dregz pos en aital port" (ibid. 393), "Jois sia comensamens" (ibid. 395), and "Be veg e conosc e say" (ibid. 398). Another of his poems ("Ar ai grant joy," Raynouard, *Choix*, III. 304), may possibly be a mystical profession of love for the Blessed Virgin, for whom, as Dante tells us, Beatrice had a special devotion.

³ *Convito*, tratt. III. c. 14. In the same chapter is perhaps an explanation of the two rather difficult verses which follow

the end of wisdom to contemplate God the true mirror (*verace specchio, speculum*), wherein all things are seen as they truly are. Nay, she her-

that in which the *verace specchio* is spoken of (*Paradiso*, xxvi. 107, 108).

“Che fa di sè pareglie l' altre cose
E nulla face lui di sè paregljo.”

Buti's comment is, “that is, makes of itself a receptacle to other things, that is, to all things that exist, which are all seen in it.” Dante says (*ubi supra*), “The descending of the virtue of one thing into another is a reducing that other into a likeness of itself. . . . Whence we see that the sun sending his ray down hitherward reduces things to a likeness with his light in so far as they are able by their disposition to receive light from his power. So I say that God reduces this love to a likeness with himself as much as it is possible for it to be like him.” In Provençal *pareilh* means *like*, and Dante may have formed his word from it. But the four earliest printed texts read: —

“Che fa di sè paregljo all' altre cose.”

Accordingly we are inclined to think that the next verse should be corrected thus: —

“E nulla face a lui di sè paregljo.”

We would form *paregljo* from *parere* (a something in which things appear), as *miraglio* from *mirare* (a something in which they are seen). God contains all things in himself, but nothing can wholly contain him. The blessed behold all things in him as if reflected, but not one of the things so reflected is capable of his image in its completeness. This interpretation is confirmed by *Paradiso*, xix. 49-51.

“E quinci appar ch' ogni minor natura
È corto recettacolo a quel bene
Che non ha fine, e sè con sè misura ”

self "is the brightness of the eternal light, the unspotted mirror of the majesty of God."¹

¹ Wisdom of Solomon, vii. 26, quoted by Dante (*Convito*, tratt. iii. c. 15). There are other passages in the Wisdom of Solomon besides that just cited which we may well believe Dante to have had in his mind when writing the canzone, beginning, —

"Amor che nella mente mi ragiona," —

and the commentary upon it, and some to which his experience of life must have given an intenser meaning. The writer of that book also personifies Wisdom as the mistress of his soul: "I loved her and sought her out from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty." He says of Wisdom that she was "present when thou (God) madest the world," and Dante in the same way identifies her with the divine Logos, citing as authority the "beginning of the Gospel of John." He tells us, "I perceived that I could not otherwise obtain her except God gave her me," and Dante came at last to the same conclusion. Again, "For the very true beginning of her is the desire of discipline; and the care of discipline is love. And love is the keeping of her laws; and the giving heed unto her laws is the assurance of incorruption." But who can doubt that he read with a bitter exultation, and applied to himself passages like these which follow? "When the righteous fled from his brother's wrath, she guided him in right paths, showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of holy things. She defended him from his enemies and kept him safe from those that lay in wait, . . . that he might know that godliness is stronger than all. . . . She forsook him not, but delivered him from sin; she went down with him into the pit, and left him not in bonds till she brought him the sceptre of the kingdom, . . . and gave him perpetual glory." It was, perhaps, from this book that Dante got the hint of making his punishments and penances typical of the

There are two beautiful passages in the "Convito," which we shall quote, both because they have, as we believe, a close application to Dante's own experience, and because they are good specimens of his style as a writer of prose. In the manly simplicity which comes of an earnest purpose, and in the eloquence of deep conviction, this is as far beyond that of any of his contemporaries as his verse; nay, more, has hardly been matched by any Italian from that day to this. Illustrating the position that "the highest desire of everything and the first given us by Nature is to return to its first cause," he says: "And since God is the beginning of our souls and the maker of them like unto himself, according as was written, 'Let us make man in our

sins that earned them. 'Wherefore, whereas men lived dissolutely and unrighteously, thou hast tormented them with their own abominations.'" Dante was intimate with the Scriptures. They do even a scholar no harm. M. Victor Le Clerc, in his *Histoire Littéraire de la France au quatorzième siècle* (tome ii. p. 72), thinks it "not impossible" that a passage in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, paraphrased by Dante, may have been suggested to him by Rutebeuf or Tristan, rather than by the prophet himself! Dante would hardly have found himself so much at home in the company of *jongleurs* as in that of prophets. Yet he was familiar with French and Provençal poetry. Beside the evidence of the *Vulgari Eloquentia*, there are frequent and broad traces in the *Commedia* of the *Roman de la Rose*, slighter ones of the *Chevalier de la Charette*, *Guillaume d'Orange*, and a direct imitation of Bernard de Ventadour.

image and likeness,' this soul most greatly desires to return to him. And as a pilgrim who goes by a way he has never travelled, who believes every house he sees afar off to be his inn, and not finding it to be so directs his belief to another, and so from house to house till he come to the inn, so our soul forthwith on entering upon the new and never-travelled road of this life directs its eyes to the goal of its highest good, and therefore believes whatever thing it sees that seems to have in it any good to be that. And because its first knowledge is imperfect by reason of not being experienced nor indoctrinated, small goods seem to it great. Wherefore we see children desire most greatly an apple, and then proceeding further on desire a bird, and then further yet desire fine raiment, and then a horse, and then a woman, and then riches not great, and then greater and greater. And this befalls because in none of these things it finds that which it goes seeking, and thinks to find it further on. By which it may be seen that one desirable stands before another in the eyes of our soul in a fashion as it were pyramidal, for the smallest at first covers the whole of them, and is as it were the apex of the highest desirable, which is God, as it were the base of all ; so that the further we go from the apex toward the base the desirables appear greater ; and this is the reason why human desires become wider one after the other. Verily

this way is lost through error as the roads of earth are; for as from one city to another there is of necessity one best and straightest way, and one that always leads farther from it, that is, the one which goes elsewhere, and many others, some less roundabout and some less direct, so in human life are divers roads whereof one is the truest and another the most deceitful, and certain ones less deceitful, and certain less true. And as we see that that which goes most directly to the city fulfils desire and gives repose after weariness, and that which goes the other way never fulfils it and never can give repose, so it falls out in our life. The good traveller arrives at the goal and repose, the erroneous never arrives thither, but with much weariness of mind, always with greedy eyes looks before him.”¹ If we may apply Dante’s own method of exposition to this passage, we find him telling us that he first sought felicity in knowledge, —

“That apple sweet which through so many branches
The care of mortals goeth in pursuit of,”² —

then in fame, a bird that flits before us as we follow,³ then in being esteemed of men (“to be

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 12.

² *Purgatorio*, xxvii. 115, 116.

³ That Dante loved fame we need not be told. He several times confesses it, especially in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, i. 17.

“How glorious she [the Vulgar Tongue] makes her intimates

clothed in purple, . . . to sit next to Darius, . . . and be called Darius his cousin"), then in power,¹ then in the riches of the Holy Spirit in larger and larger measure.² He, too, had found that there was but one straight road, whether to the Terrestrial Paradise or the Celestial City, and may come to question by and by whether they be not parallel one with the other, or even parts of the same road, by which only repose is to be reached at last. Then, when in old age "the noble soul returns to God as to that port whence she set forth on the sea of this life, . . . just as to him who comes from a long journey, before he enters into the gate of his city, the citizens thereof go forth to meet him, so the

[*familiars*, those of her household], we ourselves have known, who in the sweetness of this glory put our exile behind our backs."

¹ Dante several times uses the sitting a horse as an image of rule. See especially *Purgatorio*, vi. 99, and *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 9.

² "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!" Dante quotes this in speaking of the influence of the stars, which, interpreting it presently "by the theological way," he compares to that of the Holy Spirit. "And thy counsel who hath known, except thou give wisdom and send thy Holy Spirit from above?" (Wisdom of Solomon, ix. 17.) The last words of the *Convito* are, "her [Philosophy] whose proper dwelling is in the depths of the Divine mind." The ordinary reading is *ragione* (reason), but it seems to us an obvious blunder for *magione* (mansion, dwelling).

citizens of the eternal life go to meet *her*, and do so because of her good deeds and contemplations, who, having already betaken herself to God, seems to see those whom she believes to be nigh unto God.”¹ This also was to be the experience of Dante, for who can doubt that the “Paradiso” was something very unlike a poetical exercise to him who appeals to the visions even of sleep as proof of the soul’s immortality?

When did his soul catch a glimpse of that certainty in which “the mind that museth upon many things” can find assured rest? We have already said that we believe Dante’s political opinions to have taken their final shape and the “De Monarchia” to have been written before 1300.² That the revision of the “Vita Nuova” was completed in that year seems probable from the last sonnet but one, which is addressed to pilgrims on their way to the Santa Veronica at Rome.³ In this sonnet he still laments Beatrice

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 28.

² He refers to a change in his own opinions (lib. iii. sec. 1), where he says, “When I knew the nations to have murmured against the preëminence of the Roman people, and saw the people imagining vain things *as I myself was wont*.” He was a Guelph by inheritance, he became a Ghibelline by conviction.

³ It should seem from Dante’s words (“at the time when much people went to see the blessed image,” and “ye seem to come from a far-off people”) that this was some extraordinary occasion, and what so likely as the jubilee of 1300? (Cf.

as dead ; he would make the pilgrims share his grief. It is the very folly of despairing sorrow, that calls on the first comer, stranger though he be, for a sympathy which none can fully give, and he least of all. But in the next sonnet, the last in the book, there is a surprising change of tone. The transfiguration of Beatrice has begun, and we see completing itself that natural gradation of grief which will ere long bring the mourner to call on the departed saint to console him for her own loss. The sonnet is remarkable in more senses than one, first for its psychological truth, and then still more for the light it throws on Dante's inward history as poet and thinker. Hitherto he had celebrated beauty and goodness in the creature ; henceforth he was to celebrate them in the Creator whose praise they were.¹ We give an extempore translation of this

Paradiso, xxxi. 103-108.) Dante's comparisons are so constantly drawn from actual eyesight, that this allusion (*Inferno*, xiii. 28-33) to a device of Boniface VIII. for passing the crowds quietly across the bridge of St. Angelo, renders it not unlikely that he was in Rome at that time, and perhaps conceived his poem there as Giovanni Villani his chronicle. That Rome would deeply stir his mind and heart is beyond question. "And certes I am of a firm opinion that the stones that stand in her walls are worthy of reverence, and the soil where she sits worthy beyond what is preached and admitted of men." (*Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 5.)

¹ *Beatrice, loda di Dio vera*; *Inferno*, ii. 103. "Surely vain are all men by nature who are ignorant of God, and

sonnet, in which the meaning is preserved so far as is possible where the grace is left out. We remember with some compunction as we do it, that Dante has said, "know every one that nothing harmonized by a musical band can be transmuted from its own speech to another without breaking all its sweetness and harmony,"¹ and Cervantes was of the same mind:² —

"Beyond the sphere that hath the widest gyre
Passeth the sigh³ that leaves my heart below;

could not out of the good things that are seen know him that is, neither by considering the works did they acknowledge the work-master. . . . For, being conversant in his works, they search diligently and believe their sight, because the things are beautiful that are seen. Howbeit, neither are they to be pardoned." (Wisdom of Solomon, xiii. 1, 7, 8.) *Non adorar debitamente Dio*. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse." It was these "invisible things" whereof Dante was beginning to get a glimpse.

¹ *Convito*, tratt. 1. c. 7.

² "And here we would have forgiven Mr. Captain if he had not betrayed him (*traido, traduttore, traditore*) to Spain and made him a Castilian, for he took away much of his native worth, and so will all those do who shall undertake to turn a poem into another tongue; for with all the care they take and ability they show, they will never reach the height of its original conception," says the Curate, speaking of a translation of Ariosto. (*Don Quixote*, part 1. c. 6.)

³ In his own comment Dante says, "I tell whither goes my thought, calling it by the name of one of its effects."

A new intelligence doth love bestow
 On it with tears that ever draws it higher;
 When it wins thither where is its desire,
 A Lady it beholds who honor so
 And light receives, that, through her splendid glow,
 The pilgrim spirit ¹ sees her as in fire;
 It sees her such, that, telling me again
 I understand it not, it speaks so low
 Unto the mourning heart that bids it tell;
 Its speech is of that noble One I know,
 For 'Beatrice' I often hear full plain,
 So that, dear ladies, I conceive it well."

No one can read this in its connection with what goes before and what follows without feeling that a new conception of Beatrice had dawned upon the mind of Dante, dim as yet, or purposely made to seem so, and yet the authentic forerunner of the fulness of her rising as the light of his day and the guide of his feet, the divine wisdom whose glory pales all meaner stars. The conception of a poem in which Dante's creed in politics and morals should be picturesquely and attractively embodied, and of the high place which Beatrice should take in it, had begun vaguely to shape itself in his thought. As he brooded over it, of a sudden it defined itself clearly. "Soon after this sonnet there appeared to me a marvellous vision ² wherein I

¹ *Spirito* means in Italian both breath (*spirito ed acqua fessi*; *Purgatorio* xxx. 98) and spirit.

² By *visione* Dante means something seen waking by the inner eye. He believed also that dreams were sometimes

saw things which made me propose not to say more of that blessed one until I could treat of her more worthily. And to arrive at that I study all I can, as she verily knows. So that, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live, that my life hold out yet a few years, I hope to say that of her which was never yet said of any (woman). And then may it please Him who is the Lord of Courtesy that my soul may go to see the glory of her Lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice who gloriously beholds the face of Him *qui est per omnia saecula benedictus*." It was the method of presentation that became clear to Dante at this time, — the plan of the great poem for whose completion the experience of earth and the inspiration of heaven were to combine, and which was to make him lean for many years.¹ The doctrinal scope of it was already determined. Man, he tells us, is the only creature who partakes at once of the corruptible and incorruptible nature; "and since every nature is ordained to some ultimate end, it follows that the end of man is double. And as among all beings he alone partakes of the corruptible and incorruptible, so alone among all beings he is ordained to a double end, whereof the one is his end as corruptible, the divinely inspired, and argues from such the immortality of the soul. (*Convito*, tratt. II. c. 9.)

¹ *Paradiso*, xxv. 1-3.

other as incorruptible. That unspeakable Providence therefore foreordered two ends to be pursued by man, to wit, beatitude in this life, which consists in the operation of our own virtue, and is figured by the Terrestrial Paradise, and the beatitude of life eternal, which consists in a fruition of the divine countenance, whereto our own virtue cannot ascend unless aided by divine light, which is understood by the Celestial Paradise." The one we attain by practice of the moral and intellectual virtues as they are taught by philosophers, the other by spiritual teachings transcending human reason, and the practice of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. For one, Reason suffices ("which was wholly made known to us by philosophers"), for the other we need the light of supernatural truth revealed by the Holy Spirit and "needful for us." Men led astray by cupidity turn their backs on both, and in their bestiality need bit and rein to keep them in the way. "Wherefore to man was a double guidance needful according to the double end," the Supreme Pontiff in spiritual, the Emperor in temporal things.¹

¹ *De Monarchia*, lib. iii. sec. ult. See the whole passage in Miss Rossetti, p. 39. It is noticeable that Dante says that the pope is to *lead* (by example), the emperor to *direct* (by the enforcing of justice). The duty, we are to observe, was a double but not a divided one. To exemplify this unity was indeed one object of the *Commedia*.

But how to put this theory of his into a poetic form which might charm while it was teaching? He would typify Reason in Virgil (who would serve also as a symbol of political wisdom as having celebrated the founding of the Empire), and the grace of God in that Beatrice whom he had already supernaturalized into something which passeth all understanding. In choosing Virgil he was sure of that interest and sympathy which his instinct led him to seek in the predisposition of his readers, for the popular imagination of the Middle Ages had busied itself particularly with the Mantuan poet. The Church had given him a quasi-orthodoxy by interpreting his *jam redit et virgo* as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. At Naples he had become a kind of patron saint, and his bones were exhibited as relics. Dante himself may have heard at Mantua the hymn sung on the anniversary of St. Paul, in which the apostle to the Gentiles is represented as weeping at the tomb of the greatest of poets. Above all, Virgil had described the descent of Æneas to the underworld. Dante's choice of a guide was therefore, in a certain degree, made for him.. But the mere Reason¹ of man without the illumination

¹ "What Reason seeth here

Myself [Virgil] can tell thee; beyond that await

For Beatrice, since 't is a work of Faith." (*Pur.* xviii. 46-48.)

Beatrice here evidently impersonates Theology. It would be interesting to know what was the precise date of Dante's theological studies. The earlier commentators all make him

of divine Grace cannot be trusted, and accordingly the intervention of Beatrice was needed, — of Beatrice, as Miss Rossetti admirably well expresses it, “already transfigured, potent not only now to charm and soothe, potent to rule; to the Intellect a light, to the Affections a compass and a balance, a sceptre over the Will.”

The wood obscure in which Dante finds himself is the world.¹ The three beasts who dispute his way are the sins that most easily beset us, Pride, the Lusts of the Flesh, and Greed. We are surprised that Miss Rossetti should so local-
go to Paris, the great fountain of such learning, after his banishment. Boccaccio indeed says that he did not return to Italy till 1311. Wegele (Dante's *Leben und Werke*, p. 85) puts the date of his journey between 1292 and 1297. Ozanam, with a pathos comically touching to the academic soul, laments that poverty compelled him to leave the university without the degree he had so justly earned. He consoles himself with the thought that “there remained to him an incontestable erudition and the love of serious studies.” (*Dante et la philosophie catholique*, p. 112.) It is sad that we cannot write *Dantes Alighierius, S. T. D.*! Dante seems to imply that he began to devote himself to Philosophy and Theology shortly after Beatrice's death. (*Convito*, tratt. II. c. 13.) He compares himself to one who, “seeking silver, should, without meaning it, find gold, which an occult cause presents to him, not perhaps without the divine command.” Here again apparently is an allusion to his having found Wisdom while he sought Learning. He had thought to find God in the beauty of his works, he learned to seek all things in God.

¹ In a more general view, matter, the domain of the senses, no doubt with a recollection of Aristotle's *ἐλγ*.

ize and confine Dante's meaning as to explain them by Florence, France, and Rome. Had he written in so narrow a sense as this, it would indeed be hard to account for the persistent power of his poem. But it was no political pamphlet that Dante was writing. *Subjectum est Homo*, and it only takes the form of a diary by Dante Alighieri because of the intense realism of his imagination, a realism as striking in the "Paradiso" as the "Inferno," though it takes a different shape. Everything, the most supersensual, presented itself to his mind, not as abstract idea, but as visible type. As men could once embody a quality of good in a saint and *see* it, as they even now in moments of heightened fantasy or enthusiasm can personify their country and speak of England, France, or America, as if they were real beings, so did Dante habitually.¹ He saw all his thoughts as distinctly as the hypochondriac sees his black dog, and, as in that, their form and color were but the outward form of an inward and spiritual condition. Whatever subsidiary interpretations the poem is capable of, its great and primary value is as the autobiography of a human soul, of yours and mine, it may be, as well as Dante's. In that lie its profound meaning and its permanent force.

¹ As we have seen, even a sigh becomes *He*. This makes one of the difficulties of translating his minor poems. The modern mind is incapable of this subtlety.

That an exile, a proud man forced to be dependent, should have found some consolation in brooding over the justice of God, weighed in such different scales from those of man, in contrasting the outward prosperity of the sinner with the awful spiritual ruin within, is not wonderful, nay, we can conceive of his sometimes finding the wrath of God sweeter than his mercy. But it is wonderful that out of the very wreck of his own life he should have built this three-arched bridge, still firm against the wash and wear of ages, stretching from the Pit to the Empyrean, by which men may pass from a doubt of God's providence to a certainty of his long-suffering and loving-kindness.

"The Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms
That it receives whatever turns to it." ¹

A tear is enough to secure the saving clasp of them.² It cannot be too often repeated that Dante's Other World is not in its first conception a place of *departed* spirits. It is the Spiritual World, whereof we become denizens by birth and citizens by adoption. It is true that for artistic purposes he makes it conform so far as possible with vulgar preconceptions, but he himself has told us again and again what his real meaning was. Virgil tells Dante, —

"Thou shalt behold the people dolorous
Who have foregone the good of intellect." ³

¹ *Purgatorio*, III. 122, 123.

² *Ibid.* v. 107.

³ *Inferno*, III. 17, 18 (*hanno perduto* = thrown away).

The "good of the intellect," Dante tells us after Aristotle, is Truth.¹ He says that Virgil has led him "through the deep night of the *truly dead*."² Who are they? Dante had in mind the saying of the Apostle, "to be carnally minded is death." He says: "In man to live is to use reason. Then if living is the being of man, to depart from that use is to depart from being, and so to be dead. And doth not he depart from the use of reason who doth not reason out the object of his life?" "I say that so vile a person is dead, seeming to be alive. For we must know *that the wicked man may be called truly dead*." "He is dead who follows not the teacher. And of such a one some might say, how is he dead and yet goes about? I answer that the man is dead and the beast remains."³ Accordingly he has put living persons in the "Inferno," like Frate Alberigo and Branca d' Oria, of whom he says with bitter sarcasm that he still "eats and drinks and puts on clothes," as if that were his highest ideal of the true ends of life.⁴ There is a passage in the first canto of the "Inferno"⁵ which has been variously interpreted:—

"The ancient spirits disconsolate
Who cry out each one for the *second death*."

Miss Rossetti cites it as an example of what

¹ *Convito*, tratt. II. c. 14.

² *Purgatorio*, XXIII. 121, 122.

³ *Convito*, tratt. IV. c. 7.

⁴ *Inferno*, XXXIII. 118, et seq.

⁵ *Inferno*, I. 116, 117.

she felicitously calls "an ambiguity, not hazy, but prismatic, and therefore not really perplexing." She gives us accordingly our choice of two interpretations: "'Each cries out on account of the second death which he is suffering,' and 'Each cries out for death to come a second time and ease him of his sufferings.'"¹ Buti says: "Here one doubts what the author meant by the second death, and as for me I think he meant the last damnation, which shall be at the day of judgment, because they would wish through envy that it had already come, that they might have more companions, since the first death is the first damnation, when the soul parted from the body is condemned to the pains of hell for its sins. The second is when, resuscitated at the judgment day, they shall be finally condemned, soul and body together. . . . It may otherwise be understood as annihilation." Imola says, "Each would wish to die again, if he could, to put an end to his pain. Do not hold with some who think that Dante calls the second death the day of judgment," and then quotes a passage from St. Augustine which favors that view. Pietro di Dante gives us four interpretations among which to choose, the first being that, "allegorically,

¹ Mr. Longfellow's *for*, like the Italian *per*,^{*} gives us the same privilege of election. We "freeze for cold," we "hunger for food."

depraved and vicious men are in a certain sense dead in reputation, and this is the first death; the second is that of the body." This we believe to be the true meaning. Dante himself, in a letter to the "most rascally (*scelestissimis*) dwellers in Florence," gives us the key: "but you, transgressors of the laws of God and man, whom the direful maw of cupidity hath enticed not unwilling to every crime, does not the terror of the *second death* torment you?" Their first death was in their sins, the second is what they may expect from the just vengeance of the Emperor Henry VII. The world Dante leads us through is that of his own thought, and it need not surprise us therefore if we meet in it purely imaginary beings like Tristrem¹ and Renoard of the club.² His personality is so strongly marked that it is nothing more than natural that his poem should be interpreted as if only he and his opinions, prejudices, or passions were concerned. He would not have been the great poet he was if he had not felt intensely and humanly, but he could never have won the

¹ *Inferno*, v. 67.

² *Paradiso*, xviii. 46. Renoard is one of the heroes (a rudely humorous one) in *La Bataille d'Alischans*, an episode of the measureless *Guillaume d'Orange*. It was from the graves of those supposed to have been killed in this battle that Dante draws a comparison (*Inferno*, ix.). Boccaccio's comment on this passage might have been read to advantage by the French editors of *Alischans*.

cosmopolitan place he holds had he not known how to generalize his special experience into something mediatorial for all of us. Pietro di Dante in his comment on the thirty-first canto of the "Purgatorio" says that "unless you understand him and his figures allegorically, you will be deceived by the bark," and adds that our author made his pilgrimage as the representative of the rest (*in persona ceterorum*).¹ To give his vision reality, he has adapted it to the vulgar mythology, but to understand it as the author meant, it must be taken in the larger sense. To confine it to Florence or to Italy is to banish it from the sympathies of mankind. It was not from the campanile of the Badia that Dante got his views of life and man.

The relation of Dante to literature is monumental, and marks the era at which the modern begins. He is not only the first great poet, but the first great prose-writer who used a language

¹ We cite this comment under its received name, though it is uncertain if Pietro was the author of it. Indeed, we strongly doubt it. It is at least one of the earliest, for it appears, by the comment on *Paradiso*, xxvi., that the greater part of it was written before 1341. It is remarkable for the strictness with which it holds to the spiritual interpretation of the poem, and deserves much more to be called *Ottimo*, than the comment which goes by that name. Its publication is due to the zeal and liberality of the late Lord Vernon, to whom students of Dante are also indebted for the parallel-text reprint of the four earliest editions of the *Commedia*.

not yet subdued to literature, who used it more-over for scientific and metaphysical discussion, thus giving an incalculable impulse to the culture of his countrymen by making the laity free of what had hitherto been the exclusive guild of clerks.¹ Whatever poetry had preceded him, whether in the Romance or Teutonic tongues, is interesting mainly for its simplicity without forethought, or, as in the "Nibelungen," for a kind of savage grandeur that rouses the sympathy of whatever of the natural man is dormant in us. But it shows no trace of the creative faculty either in unity of purpose or style, the proper characteristics of literature. If it have the charm of wanting artifice, it has not the higher charm of art. We are in the realm of chaos and chance, nebular, with phosphorescent gleams here and there, star-stuff, but uncondensed in stars. The "Nibelungen" is not without far-reaching hints and forebodings of something finer than we find in it, but they are a glamour from the vague darkness which

¹ See Wegele, *ubi supra*, p. 174, et seq. The best analysis of Dante's opinions we have ever met with is Emil Ruth's *Studien über Dante Alighieri*, Tübingen, 1853. Unhappily it wants an index, and accordingly loses a great part of its usefulness for those not already familiar with the subject. Nor are its references sufficiently exact. We always respect Dr. Ruth's opinions, if we do not wholly accept them, for they are all the results of original and assiduous study.

encircles it, like the whisper of the sea upon an unknown shore at night, powerful only over the more vulgar side of the imagination, and leaving no thought, scarce even any image (at least of beauty) behind them. Such poems are the amours, not the lasting friendships and possessions of the mind. They thrill and cannot satisfy.

But Dante is not merely the founder of modern literature. He would have been that if he had never written anything more than his "Canzoni," which for elegance, variety of rhythm, and fervor of sentiment were something altogether new. They are of a higher mood than any other poems of the same style in their own language, or indeed in any other. In beauty of phrase and subtlety of analogy they remind one of some of the Greek tragic choruses. We are constantly moved in them by a nobleness of tone, whose absence in many admired lyrics of the kind is poorly supplied by conceits. So perfect is Dante's mastery of his material, that in compositions, as he himself has shown, so artificial,¹

¹ See the second book of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. The only other Italian poet who reminds us of Dante in sustained dignity is Guido Guinicelli. Dante esteemed him highly, calls him maximus in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, and "the father of me and of my betters," in *Purgatorio*, xxvi. See some excellent specimens of him in Mr. D. G. Rossetti's remarkable volume of translations from the early Italian poets. Mr. Rossetti would do a real and lasting service to literature by em-

the form seems rather organic than mechanical, which cannot be said of the best of the Provençal poets who led the way in this kind. Dante's sonnets also have a grace and tenderness which have been seldom matched. His lyrical excellence would have got him into the Collections, and he would have made here and there an enthusiast as Donne does in English, but his great claim to remembrance is not merely Italian. It is that he was the first Christian poet, in any proper sense of the word, the first who so subdued dogma to the uses of plastic imagination as to make something that is still poetry of the highest order after it has suffered the disenchantment inevitable in the most perfect translation. Verses of the kind usually called *sacred* (reminding one of the adjective's double meaning) had been written before his time in the vulgar tongue, such verses as remain inviolably sacred in the volumes of specimens, looked at with distant reverence by the pious, and with far other feelings by the profane reader. There were cycles of poems in which the physical conflict between Christianity and Paganism¹ furnished the subject, but in which the theological views of the authors, whether doctrinal or his-

employing his singular gift in putting Dante's minor poems into English.

¹ The old French poems confound all unbelievers together as pagans and worshippers of idols.

torical, could hardly be reconciled with any system of religion ancient or modern. There were Church legends of saints and martyrs versified, fit certainly to make any other form of martyrdom seem amiable to those who heard them, and to suggest palliative thoughts about Diocletian. Finally, there were the romances of Arthur and his knights, which later, by means of allegory, contrived to be both entertaining and edifying; every one who listened to them paying the minstrel his money, and having his choice whether he would take them as song or sermon. In the heroes of some of these certain Christian virtues were typified, and around a few of them, as the Holy Grail, a perfume yet lingers of cloistered piety and withdrawal. Wolfram von Eschenbach, indeed, has divided his "Parzival" into three books, of Simplicity, Doubt, and Healing, which has led Gervinus to trace a not altogether fanciful analogy between that poem and the "Divina Commedia." The doughty old poet, who says of himself, —

"Of song I have some slight control,
But deem her of a feeble soul
That doth not love my naked sword
Above my sweetest lyric word," —

tells us that his subject is the choice between good and evil; —

"Whose soul takes Untruth for its bride
And sets himself on Evil's side,

Chooses the Black, and sure it is
His path leads down to the abyss;
But he who doth his nature feed
With steadfastness and loyal deed
Lies open to the heavenly light
And takes his portion with the White."

But Wolfram's poem has no system, and shows good feeling rather than settled conviction. Above all it is wandering (as he himself confesses), and altogether wants any controlling purpose. But to whatever extent Christianity had insinuated itself into and colored European literature, it was mainly as mythology. The Christian idea had never yet incorporated itself. It was to make its avatar in Dante. To understand fully what he accomplished we must form some conception of what is meant by the Christian idea. To bring it into fuller relief, let us contrast it with the Greek idea as it appears in poetry; for we are not dealing with a question of theology so much as with one of æsthetics.

Greek art at its highest point is doubtless the most perfect that we know. But its circle of motives was essentially limited; and the Greek drama in its passion, its pathos, and its humor is primarily Greek, and secondarily human. Its tragedy chooses its actors from certain heroic families, and finds its springs of pity and terror in physical suffering and worldly misfortune. Its best examples, like the "Antigone," illus-

trate a single duty, or, like the "Hippolytus," a single passion, on which, as on a pivot, the chief character, statuesquely simple in its details, revolves as pieces of sculpture are sometimes made to do, displaying its different sides in one invariable light. The general impression left on the mind (and this is apt to be a truer one than any drawn from single examples) is that the duty is one which is owed to custom, that the passion leads to a breach of some convention settled by common consent,¹ and accordingly it is an outraged society whose figure looms in the background, rather than an offended God. At most it was one god of many, and meanwhile another might be friendly. In the Greek epic, the gods are partisans, they hold caucuses, they lobby and log-roll for their candidates. The tacit admission of a revealed code of morals wrought a great change. The complexity and range of passion is vastly increased when the offence is at once both crime and sin, a wrong done against order and against conscience at the same time. The relation of the Greek tragedy to the higher powers is chiefly antagonistic, struggle against an implacable destiny, sublime struggle, and of heroes, but sure of defeat at last. And that defeat

¹ Dante is an ancient in this respect as in many others, but the difference is that with him society is something divinely ordained. He follows Aristotle pretty closely, but on his own theory crime and sin are identical.

is final. Grand figures are those it exhibits to us, in some respects unequalled, and in their severe simplicity they compare with modern poetry as sculpture with painting. Considered merely as works of art, these products of the Greek imagination satisfy our highest conception of form. They suggest inevitably a feeling of perfect completeness, isolation, and independence, of something rounded and finished in itself. The secret of those old sharpeners died with them; their wand is broken, their book sunk deeper than ever plummet sounded. The type of their work is the Greek temple, which leaves nothing to hope for in unity and perfection of design, in harmony and subordination of parts, and in entireness of impression. But in this æsthetic completeness it ends. It rests solidly and complacently on the earth, and the mind rests there with it.

Now the Christian idea has to do with the human soul, which Christianity may be almost said to have invented. While all Paganism represents a few preëminent families, the founders of dynasties or ancestors of races, as of kin with the gods, Christianity makes every pedigree end in Deity, makes monarch and slave the children of one God. Its heroes struggle not against, but upward and onward *toward*, the higher powers who are always on their side. Its highest conception of beauty is not æsthetic,

but moral. With it prosperity and adversity have exchanged meanings. It finds enemies in those worldly good fortunes where Pagan and even Hebrew literature saw the highest blessing, and invincible allies in sorrow, poverty, humbleness of station, where the former world recognized only implacable foes. While it utterly abolished all boundary lines of race or country and made mankind unitary, its hero is always the individual man whoever and wherever he may be. Above all, an entirely new conception of the Infinite and of man's relation to it came in with Christianity. That, and not the finite, is always the background, consciously or not. It changed the scene of the last act of every drama to the next world. Endless aspiration of all the faculties became thus the ideal of Christian life, and to express it more or less perfectly the ideal of essentially Christian art. It was this which the Middle Ages instinctively typified in the Gothic cathedral, — no accidental growth, but the visible symbol of an inward faith, — which soars forever upward, and yearns toward heaven like a martyr-flame suddenly turned to stone.

It is not without significance that Goethe, who, like Dante, also absorbed and represented the tendency and spirit of his age, should, during his youth and while Europe was alive with the moral and intellectual longing which preluded the French Revolution, have loved the Gothic

architecture. It is no less significant that in the period of reaction toward more positive thought which followed, he should have preferred the Greek. His greatest poem, conceived during the former era, is Gothic. Dante, endeavoring to conform himself to literary tradition, began to write the "*Divina Commedia*" in Latin, and had elaborated several cantos of it in that dead and intractable material. But that poetic instinct, which is never the instinct of an individual, but of his age, could not so be satisfied, and leaving the classic structure he had begun to stand as a monument of failure, he completed his work in Italian. Instead of endeavoring to manufacture a great poem out of what was foreign and artificial, he let the poem make itself out of him. The epic which he wished to write in the universal language of scholars, and which might have had its ten lines in the history of literature, would sing itself in provincial Tuscan, and turns out to be written in the universal dialect of mankind. Thus all great poets have been in a certain sense provincial,—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns, Scott in the "*Heart of Midlothian*" and "*Bride of Lammermoor*,"—because the office of the poet is always vicarious, because nothing that has not been living experience can become living expression, because the collective thought, the faith, the desire of a nation or a race, is the cumulative result of many ages, is

something organic, and is wiser and stronger than any single person, and will make a great statesman or a great poet out of any man who can entirely surrender himself to it.

As the Gothic cathedral, then, is the type of the Christian idea, so is it also of Dante's poem. And as that in its artistic unity is but the completed thought of a single architect, which yet could never have been realized except out of the faith and by the contributions of an entire people, whose beliefs and superstitions, whose imagination and fancy, find expression in its statues and its carvings, its calm saints and martyrs now at rest forever in the seclusion of their canopied niches, and its wanton grotesques thrusting themselves forth from every pinnacle and gargoyle, so in Dante's poem, while it is as personal and peculiar as if it were his private journal and autobiography, we can yet read the diary and the autobiography of the thirteenth century and of the Italian people. Complete and harmonious in design as his work is, it is yet no Pagan temple enshrining a type of the human made divine by triumph of corporeal beauty; it is not a private chapel housing a single saint and dedicate to one chosen bloom of Christian piety or devotion; it is truly a cathedral, over whose high altar hangs the emblem of suffering, of the Divine made human to teach the beauty of adversity, the eternal presence of the spiritual, not

overhanging and threatening, but informing and sustaining the material. In this cathedral of Dante's there are side chapels as is fit, with altars to all Christian virtues and perfections ; but the great impression of its leading thought is that of aspiration, for ever and ever. In the three divisions of the poem we may trace something more than a fancied analogy with a Christian basilica. There is first the ethnic forecourt, then the purgatorial middle space, and last the holy of holies dedicated to the eternal presence of the mediatorial God.

But what gives Dante's poem a peculiar claim to the title of the first Christian poem is not merely its doctrinal truth or its Christian mythology, but the fact that the scene of it is laid, not in this world, but in the soul of man ; that it is the allegory of a human life, and therefore universal in its significance and its application. The genius of Dante has given to it such a self-subsistent reality, that one almost gets to feel as if the chief value of contemporary Italian history had been to furnish it with explanatory footnotes, and the age in which it was written assumes towards it the place of a satellite. For Italy, Dante is the thirteenth century.

Most men make the voyage of life as if they carried sealed orders which they were not to open till they were fairly in mid-ocean. But Dante had made up his mind as to the true purpose

and meaning of our existence in this world shortly after he had passed his twenty-fifth year. He had already conceived the system about which as a connecting thread the whole experience of his life, the whole result of his studies, was to cluster in imperishable crystals. The corner-stone of his system was the Freedom of the Will (in other words, the right of private judgment with the condition of accountability), which Beatrice calls the "noble virtue."¹ As to every man is offered his choice between good and evil, and as, even upon the root of a nature originally evil a habit of virtue may be engrafted,² no man is excused. "All hope abandon ye who enter in," for they have thrown away reason which is the good of the intellect, "and it seems to me no less a marvel to bring back to reason him in whom it is wholly spent than to bring back to life him who has been four days in the tomb."³ As a guide of the will in civil affairs

¹ *Purgatorio*, xviii. 73. He defines it in the *De Monarchia* (lib. i. sec. 14). Among other things he calls it "the first beginning of our liberty." In *Paradiso*, v. 19, 20, he calls it "the greatest gift that in his largess God creating made." "Dico quod iudicium medium est apprehensionis et appetitus." (*De Monarchia*, *ubi supra*.)

"Right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides."

(*Troilus and Cressida*.)

² *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 22.

³ *Ibid.* tratt. iv. c. 7. "Qui descenderit ad inferos, non ascendet." (Job vii. 9.)

the Emperor ; in spiritual, the Pope.¹ Dante is not one of those reformers who would assume the office of God to "make all things new." He knew the power of tradition and habit, and wished to utilize it for his purpose. He found the Empire and the Papacy already existing, but both needing reformation that they might serve the ends of their original institution. Bad leadership was to blame ; men fit to gird on the sword had been turned into priests, and good preachers spoiled to make bad kings.² The spiritual had usurped to itself the prerogatives of the temporal power.

"Rome, that reformed the world, accustomed was
Two suns to have which one road and the other,
Of God and of the world, made manifest.
One has the other quenched, and to the crosier
The sword is joined, and ill beseemeth it,

Because, being joined one feareth not the other."³

Both powers held their authority directly from God, "not so, however, that the Roman Prince is not in some things subject to the Roman Pontiff, since that human felicity [to be attained

¹ But it may be inferred that he put the interests of mankind above both. "For citizens," he says, "exist not for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the king, but, on the contrary, consuls for the sake of citizens, and the king for the sake of the people."

² *Paradiso*, viii. 145, 146.

³ *Purgatorio*, xvi. 106, 112.

only by peace, justice, and good government, possible only under a single ruler] is in some sort ordained to the end of immortal felicity. Let Cæsar use that reverence toward Peter which a first-born son ought to use toward a father; that, shone upon by the light of paternal grace, he may more powerfully illumine the orb of earth over which he is set by him alone who is the ruler of all things spiritual and temporal.”¹ As to the fatal gift of Constantine, Dante demonstrates that an Emperor could not alienate what he held only in trust; but if he made the gift, the Pope should hold it as a feudatory of the Empire, for the benefit, however, of Christ’s poor.² Dante is always careful to distinguish between the Papacy and the Pope. He prophesies for Boniface VIII. a place in hell,³ but acknowledges him as the Vicar of Christ, goes so far even as to denounce the outrage of Guillaume

¹ *De Monarchia*, sec. ult.

² Ibid. lib. iii. sec. 10. “Poterat tamen Imperator in patrocinium Ecclesiae patrimonium et alia deputare immoto semper superiori dominio cujus unitas divisionem non patitur. Poterat et Vicarius Dei recipere, non tanquam possessor, sed tanquam fructuum pro Ecclesia proque Christi pauperibus dispensator.” He tells us that St. Dominic did not ask for the tithes which belong to the poor of God. (*Paradiso*, xii. 93, 94.) “Let them return whence they came,” he says (*De Monarchia*, lib. ii. sec. 12); “they came well, let them return ill, for they were well given and ill held.”

³ *Inferno*, xix. 53; *Paradiso*, xxx. 145-148.

de Nogaret at Anagni as done to the Saviour himself.¹ But in the Spiritual World Dante acknowledges no such supremacy, and, when he would have fallen on his knees before Adrian V., is rebuked by him in a quotation from the Apocalypse : —

“ Err not, fellow servant am I

With thee and with the others to one power.”²

So impartial was this man whose great work is so often represented as a kind of bag in which he secreted the gall of personal prejudice, so truly Catholic is he, that both parties find their arsenal in him. The Romanist proves his soundness in doctrine, the anti-Romanist claims him as the first Protestant; the Mazzinist and the Imperialist can alike quote him for their purpose. Dante's ardent conviction would not let him see that both Church and Empire were on the wane. If an ugly suspicion of this would force itself upon him, perhaps he only clung to both the more tenaciously; but he was no blind theorist. He would reform the Church through the Church, and is less anxious for Italian independence than for Italian good government under an Emperor from Germany rather than from Utopia.

The Papacy was a necessary part of Dante's system, as a supplement to the Empire, which we strongly incline to believe was always foremost

¹ *Purgatorio*, xx. 86–92. ² *Ibid.* xix. 134, 135.

in his mind. In a passage already quoted, he says that "the soil where Rome sits is worthy beyond what men preach and admit," that is, as the birthplace of the Empire. Both in the "Convito" and the "De Monarchia" he affirms that the course of Roman history was providentially guided from the first. Rome was founded in the same year that brought into the world David, ancestor of the Redeemer after the flesh. St. Augustine said that "God showed in the most opulent and illustrious Empire of the Romans how much the civil virtues might avail even without true religion, that it might be understood how, this added, men became citizens of another city whose king is truth, whose law charity, and whose measure eternity." Dante goes further than this. He makes the Romans as well as the Jews a chosen people, the one as founders of civil society, the other as depositaries of the true faith.¹ One side of Dante's mind was so practical and positive, and his pride in the Romans so intense,² that he

¹ This results from the whole course of his argument in the second book of *De Monarchia*, and in *Paradiso*, vi., he calls the Roman eagle "the bird of God" and "the scutcheon of God." We must remember that with Dante God is always the "Emperor of Heaven," the barons of whose court are the Apostles. (*Paradiso*, xxiv. 115; *ibid.* xxv. 17.)

² Dante seems to imply (though his name be German) that he was of Roman descent. He makes the original inhabitants of Florence (*Inferno*, xv. 77, 78) of Roman seed; and

sometimes seems to regard their mission as the higher of the two. Without peace, which only good government could give, mankind could not arrive at the highest virtue, whether of the active or contemplative life. "And since what is true of the part is true of the whole, and it happens in the particular man that by sitting quietly he is perfected in prudence and wisdom, it is clear that the human race in the quiet or tranquillity of peace is most freely and easily disposed for its proper work which is almost divine, as it is written, 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.'¹ Whence it is manifest that universal peace is the best of those things which are ordained for our beatitude. Hence it is that not riches, not pleasures, not honors, not length of life, not health, not strength, not comeliness, was sung to the shepherds from on high, but peace."² It was Dante's experience of the confusion of Italy, where

"One doth gnaw the other

Of those whom one wall and one fosse shut in,"³

Cacciaguida, when asked by him about his ancestry, makes no more definite answer than that their dwelling was in the most ancient part of the city. (*Paradiso*, xvi. 40.)

¹ Man was created, according to Dante (*Convito*, tratt. ii. c. 6), to supply the place of the fallen angels, and is in a sense superior to the angels, inasmuch as he has reason, which they do not need.

² *De Monarchia*, lib. i. sec. 5.

³ *Purgatorio*, vi. 83, 84.

Which is the ladder to all high designs,
Then enterprise is sick."¹

Yet no one can read Dante without feeling that he had a high sense of the worth of freedom, whether in thought or government. He represents, indeed, the very object of his journey through the triple realm of shades as a search after liberty.² But it must not be that scramble after undefined and indefinable rights which ends always in despotism, equally degrading whether crowned with a red cap or an imperial diadem. His theory of liberty has for its cornerstone the Freedom of the Will, and the will is free only when the judgment wholly controls the appetite.³ On such a base even a democracy may rest secure, and on such alone.

Rome was always the central point of Dante's speculation. A shadow of her old sovereignty was still left her in the primacy of the Church, to which unity of faith was essential. He accordingly has no sympathy with heretics of whatever kind. He puts the ex-troubadour Bishop of Marseilles, chief instigator of the horrors of Provence, in paradise.⁴ The Church is infallible in spiritual matters, but this is an affair of outward discipline merely, and means the Church

¹ *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 1. Sc. 3. The whole speech is very remarkable both in thought and phrase.

² *Purgatorio*, 1. 71.

³ *De Monarchia*, lib. 1. sec. 14.

⁴ *Paradiso*, ix.

as a form of polity. Unity was Dante's leading doctrine, and therefore he puts Mahomet among the schismatics, not because he divided the Church, but the faith.¹ Dante's Church was of this world, but he surely believed in another and spiritual one. It has been questioned whether he was orthodox or not. There can be no doubt of it so far as outward assent and conformity are concerned, which he would practise himself and enforce upon others as the first postulate of order, the prerequisite for all happiness in this life. In regard to the Visible Church he was a reformer, but no revolutionist; it is sheer ignorance to speak of him as if there were anything new or exceptional in his denunciation of the corruptions of the clergy. They were the commonplaces of the age, nor were they confined to laymen.² To the absolute authority of the Church Dante admitted some exceptions. He denies that the supreme Pontiff has the unlimited power of binding and loosing claimed for him. "Otherwise he might absolve me impenitent, which God himself could not do."³

"By malison of theirs is not so lost
Eternal Love that it cannot return."⁴

¹ *Inferno*, xxviii.; *Purgatorio*, xxxii.

² See the poems of Walter Mapes (who was Archdeacon of Oxford); the *Bible Guiot*, and the *Bible au seigneur de Berze*, Barbazan and Méon, II.

³ *De Monarchia*, lib. III. sec. 8.

⁴ *Purgatorio*, III. 133, 134.

Nor does the sacredness of the office extend to him who chances to hold it. Philip the Fair himself could hardly treat Boniface VIII. worse than he. With wonderful audacity, he declares the papal throne vacant by the mouth of St. Peter himself.¹ Even if his theory of a dual government were not in question, Dante must have been very cautious in meddling with the Church. It was not an age that stood much upon ceremony. He himself tells us he had seen men burned alive, and the author of the "*Ottimo Comento*" says: "I the writer saw followers of his [Fra Dolcino] burned at Padua to the number of twenty-two together."² Clearly, in such a time as this, one must not make "the veil of the mysterious verse" *too* thin.³

In the affairs of this life Dante was, as we have said, supremely practical, and he makes prudence the chief of the cardinal virtues.⁴ He has made up his mind to take things as they come, and to do at Rome as the Romans do.

"Ah, savage company! but in the Church
With saints, and in the tavern with the gluttons!"⁵

In the world of thought it was otherwise, and

¹ *Paradiso*, xxvii. 22.

² *Purgatorio*, xxvii. 18; *Ottimo, Inferno*, xxviii. 55.

³ *Inferno*, ix. 63; *Purgatorio*, viii. 20.

⁴ *Purgatorio*, xxix. 131, 132.

⁵ *Inferno*, xxii. 13, 14.

here Dante's doctrine, if not precisely esoteric, was certainly not that of his day, and must be gathered from hints rather than direct statements. The general notion of God was still (perhaps is largely even now) of a provincial, one might almost say a denominational, Deity. The popular poets always represent Macon, Apolin, Tervagant, and the rest as quasi-deities unable to resist the superior strength of the Christian God. The Paynim answers the arguments of his would-be converters with the taunt that he would never worship a divinity who could not save himself from being done ignominiously to death. Dante evidently was not satisfied with the narrow conception which limits the interest of the Deity to the affairs of Jews and Christians. That saying of St. Paul, "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you," had perhaps influenced him, but his belief in the divine mission of the Roman people probably was conclusive. "The Roman Empire had the help of miracles in perfecting itself," he says, and then enumerates some of them. The first is that "under Numa Pompilius, the second king of the Romans, when he was sacrificing according to the rite of the Gentiles, a shield fell from heaven into the city chosen of God."¹ In the "Convito" we find "Virgil speaking in the person of God,"

¹ *De Monarchia*, lib. II. sec. 4.

and Æacus "wisely having recourse to God," the god being Jupiter.¹ Ephialtes is punished in hell for rebellion against "the Supreme Jove,"² and, that there may be no misunderstanding, Dante elsewhere invokes the

"Jove Supreme,
Who upon earth for us wast crucified."³

It is noticeable also that Dante, with evident design, constantly alternates examples drawn from Christian and Pagan tradition or mythology.⁴ He had conceived a unity in the human race, all of whose branches had worshipped the same God under divers names and aspects, and had arrived at the same truth by different roads. We cannot understand a passage in the twenty-sixth "Paradiso," where Dante inquires of Adam concerning the names of God, except as a hint that the Chosen People had done in this thing even as the Gentiles did.⁵ It is true that he puts all

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 4; *ibid.* c. 27; *Æneid*, i. 178, 179; Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, vii.

² *Inferno*, xxxi. 92.

³ *Purgatorio*, vi. 118, 119. Pulci, not understanding, has parodied this. (*Morgante*, canto ii. st. 1.)

⁴ See, for example, *Purgatorio*, xx. 100-117.

⁵ We believe that Dante, though he did not understand Greek, knew something of Hebrew. He would have been likely to study it as the sacred language, and opportunities of profiting by the help of learned Jews could not have been wanting to him in his wanderings. In the above-cited passage some of the best texts read *I s' appellava*, and others *Un s' appellava*.

Pagans in Limbo, "where without hope they live in longing," and that he makes baptism essential to salvation.¹ But it is noticeable that his Limbo is the Elysium of Virgil, and that he particularizes Adam, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, and others as prisoners there with the rest till the descent of Christ into hell.² But were they altogether without hope? and did baptism mean an immersion of the body or a purification of the soul? The state of the heathen after death had evidently been to Dante one of those doubts that spring up at the foot of every truth. In the "De Monarchia" he says: "There are some judgments of God to which, though human reason cannot attain by its own strength, yet is it lifted to them by the help of faith and of those things which are said to us in Holy Writ, — as to this, that no one, however perfect in the moral and intellectual virtues both as a habit [of the mind] and in practice, can be saved without faith, it being granted that he shall never have heard anything concerning Christ; for the unaided reason of man cannot look upon this as just; nevertheless, with the help of faith, it God was called *I* (the *Je* in Jehovah) or *One*, and afterwards *El*, — the strong, — an epithet given to many gods. Which-ever reading we adopt, the meaning and the inference from it are the same.

¹ *Inferno*, iv.

² Dante's "Limbo," of course, is the older "Limbus Patrum."

can.”¹ But faith, it should seem, was long in lifting Dante to this height; for in the nineteenth canto of the “Paradiso,” which must have been written many years after the passage just cited, the doubt recurs again, and we are told that it was “a cavern,” concerning which he had “made frequent questioning.” The answer is given here:—

“Truly to him who with me subtilizes,
If so the Scripture were not over you,
 For doubting there were marvellous occasion.”

But what Scripture? Dante seems cautious, tells us that the eternal judgments are above our comprehension, postpones the answer, and when it comes, puts an orthodox prophylactic before it:—

“Unto this kingdom never
 Ascended one who had not faith in Christ,
 Before or since he to the tree was nailed.
 But look thou, *many crying are, ‘Christ, Christ!’*
Who at the judgment shall be far less near
To him than some shall be who knew not Christ.”

There is, then, some hope for the man born on the bank of Indus who has never heard of Christ? Dante is still cautious, but answers the question indirectly in the next canto by putting the Trojan Ripheus among the blessed:—

“Who would believe, down in the errant world,
 That e’er the Trojan Ripheus in this round
 Could be the fifth one of these holy lights?

¹ *De Monarchia*, lib. ii. sec. 8.

Now knoweth he enough of what the world
 Has not the power to see of grace divine,
 Although *his* sight may not discern the bottom."

Then he seems to hesitate again, brings in the Church legend of Trajan brought back to life by the prayers of Gregory the Great that he might be converted; and after an interval of fifty lines tells us how Ripheus was saved:—

"The other one, through grace, that from so deep
 A fountain wells that never hath the eye
 Of any creature reached its primal wave,
 Set all his love below on righteousness;
 Wherefore from grace to grace did God uncloset
 His eye to our redemption yet to be,
 Whence he believed therein, and suffered not
 From that day forth the stench of Paganism,
 And he reprov'd therefor the folk perverse.
 Those Maidens three, whom at the right-hand wheel¹
 Thou didst behold, were unto him for baptism
 More than a thousand years before baptizing."

If the reader recall a passage already quoted from the "Convito,"² he will perhaps think with us that the gate of Dante's *Limbo* is left ajar even for the ancient philosophers to slip out. The divine judgments are still inscrutable, and the ways of God past finding out, but faith would seem to

¹ Faith, Hope, and Charity. (*Purgatorio*, xxix. 121.)
 Mr. Longfellow has translated the last verse literally. The meaning is, —

"More than a thousand years ere baptism was."

² In which the *celestial Athens* is mentioned.

have led Dante at last to a more merciful solution of his doubt than he had reached when he wrote the "De Monarchia." It is always humanizing to see how the most rigid creed is made to bend before the kindlier instincts of the heart. The stern Dante thinks none beyond hope save those who are dead in sin, and have made evil their good. But we are by no means sure that he is not right in insisting rather on the implacable severity of the law than on the possible relenting of the judge. Exact justice is commonly more merciful in the long run than pity, for it tends to foster in men those stronger qualities which make them good citizens, an object second only with the Roman-minded Dante to that of making them spiritually regenerate, nay, perhaps even more important as a necessary preliminary to it. The inscription over the gate of hell tells us that the terms on which we receive the trust of life were fixed by the Divine Power (which can what it wills), and are therefore unchangeable; by the Highest Wisdom, and therefore for our truest good; by the Primal Love, and therefore the kindest. These are the three attributes of that justice which moved the maker of them. Dante is no harsher than experience, which always exacts the uttermost farthing; no more inexorable than conscience, which never forgives nor forgets. No teaching is truer or more continually needful than that

the stains of the soul are ineffaceable, and that though their growth may be arrested, their nature is to spread insidiously till they have brought all to their own color. Evil is a far more cunning and persevering propagandist than Good, for it has no inward strength, and is driven to seek countenance and sympathy. It must have company, for it cannot bear to be alone in the dark, while

“Virtue can see to do what Virtue would
By her own radiant light.”

There is one other point which we will dwell on for a moment as bearing on the question of Dante's orthodoxy. His nature was one in which, as in Swedenborg's, a clear practical understanding was continually streamed over by the northern lights of mysticism, through which the familiar stars shine with a softened and more spiritual lustre. Nothing is more interesting than the way in which the two qualities of his mind alternate, and indeed play into each other, tingeing his matter-of-fact sometimes with unexpected glows of fancy, sometimes giving an almost geometrical precision to his most mystical visions. In his letter to Can Grande he says: “It behooves not those to whom it is given to know what is best in us to follow the footprints of the herd; much rather are they bound to oppose its wanderings. For the vigorous in intellect and reason, endowed with a certain divine

liberty, are constrained by no customs. Nor is it wonderful, since they are not governed by the laws, but much more govern the laws themselves." It is not impossible that Dante, whose love of knowledge was all-embracing, may have got some hint of the doctrine of the Oriental Sufis. With them the first and lowest of the steps that lead upward to perfection is the Law, a strict observance of which is all that is expected of the ordinary man whose mind is not open to the conception of a higher virtue and holiness. But the Sufi puts himself under the guidance of some holy man [Virgil in the *Inferno*], whose teaching he receives implicitly, and so arrives at the second step, which is the Path [*Purgatorio*] by which he reaches a point where he is freed from all outward ceremonials and observances, and has risen from an outward to a spiritual worship. The third step is Knowledge [*Paradiso*], endowed by which with supernatural insight, he becomes like the angels about the throne, and has but one farther step to take before he reaches the goal and becomes one with God. The analogies of this system with Dante's are obvious and striking. They become still more so when Virgil takes leave of him at the entrance of the Terrestrial Paradise with the words:—

“Expect no more a word or sign from me;
Free and upright and sound is thy free-will,

And error were it not to do its bidding;
Thee o'er thyself I therefore crown and mitre,"¹ —

that is, "I make thee king and bishop over thyself; the inward light is to be thy law in things both temporal and spiritual." The originality of Dante consists in his not allowing any divorce between the intellect and the soul in its highest sense, in his making reason and intuition work together to the same end of spiritual perfection. The unsatisfactoriness of science leads Faust to seek repose in worldly pleasure; it led Dante to find it in faith, of whose efficacy the shortcoming of all logical substitutes for it was the most convincing argument. That we cannot know, is to him a proof that there is some higher plane on which we can believe and see. Dante had discovered the incalculable worth of a single idea as compared with the largest heap of facts ever gathered. To a man more interested in the soul of things than in the body of them, the little finger of Plato is thicker than the loins of Aristotle.

We cannot but think that there is something like a fallacy in Mr. Buckle's theory that the advance of mankind is necessarily in the direction of science, and not in that of morals. No doubt the laws of morals existed from the beginning, but so also did those of science, and it is by the application, not the mere recognition,

¹ *Purgatorio*, xxvii. 139-142.

of both that the race is benefited. No one questions how much science has done for our physical comfort and convenience, and with the mass of men these perhaps must of necessity precede the quickening of their moral instincts; but such material gains are illusory, unless they go hand in hand with a corresponding ethical advance. The man who gives his life for a principle has done more for his kind than he who discovers a new metal or names a new gas, for the great motors of the race are moral, not intellectual, and their force lies ready to the use of the poorest and weakest of us all. We accept a truth of science so soon as it is demonstrated, are perfectly willing to take it on authority, can appropriate whatever use there may be in it without the least understanding of its processes, as men send messages by the electric telegraph, but every truth of morals must be redemonstrated in the experience of the individual man before he is capable of utilizing it as a constituent of character or a guide in action. A man does not receive the statements that "two and two make four," and that "the pure in heart shall see God," on the same terms. The one can be proved to him with four grains of corn; he can never arrive at a belief in the other till he realize it in the intimate persuasion of his whole being. This is typified in the mystery of the incarnation. The divine reason must forever manifest

itself anew in the lives of men, and that as individuals. This atonement with God, this identification of the man with the truth,¹ so that right action shall not result from the lower reason of utility, but from the higher of a will so purified of self as to sympathize by instinct with the eternal laws,² is not something that can be done once for all, that can become historic and traditional, a dead flower pressed between the leaves of the family Bible, but must be renewed in every generation, and in the soul of every man, that it may be valid. Certain sects show their recognition of this in what are called revivals, a gross and carnal attempt to apply truth, as it were, mechanically, and to accomplish by the etherization of excitement and the magnetism of crowds what is possible only in the solitary exaltations of the soul. This is the high moral of Dante's poem. We have likened it to a Christian basilica; and as in that so there is here also, painted or carven, every image of beauty and holiness the artist's mind could conceive for the adornment of the holy place. We

¹ "I conceived myself to be now," says Milton, "not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded."

² "But now was turning my desire and will,
Even as a wheel that equally is moved,
The Love that moves the sun and other stars."

(*Paradiso*, xxxiii., closing verses of the *Divina Commedia*.)

may linger to enjoy these if we will, but if we follow the central thought that runs like the nave from entrance to choir, it leads us to an image of the divine made human, to teach us how the human might also make itself divine. Dante beholds at last an image of that Power, Love, and Wisdom, one in essence, but trine in manifestation, to answer the needs of our triple nature and satisfy the senses, the heart, and the mind.

“ Within the deep and luminous subsistence
 Of the High Light appeared to me three circles,
 Of threefold color and of one dimension,
 And by the second seemed the first reflected
 As Iris is by Iris, and the third
 Seemed fire that equally from both is breathed.

Within itself, of its own very color,
 Seemed to me painted with our effigy,
 Wherefore my sight was all absorbed therein.”

He had reached the high altar where the miracle of transubstantiation is wrought, itself also a type of the great conversion that may be accomplished in our own nature (the lower thing assuming the qualities of the higher), not by any process of reason, but by the very fire of the divine love.

“ Then there smote my mind
 A flash of lightning wherein came its wish.”¹

¹ Dante seems to allude directly to this article of the Catholic faith when he says, on entering the Celestial Paradise, “to signify transhumanizing by words could not be done,”

Perhaps it seems little to say that Dante was the first great poet who ever made a poem wholly out of himself, but, rightly looked at, it implies a wonderful self-reliance and originality in his genius. His is the first keel that ever ventured into the silent sea of human consciousness to find a new world of poetry.

“L’ acqua ch’ io prendo giammai non si corse.”¹

He discovered that not only the story of some heroic person, but that of any man might be epical; that the way to heaven was not outside the world, but through it. Living at a time when the end of the world was still looked for as imminent,² he believed that the second coming of the Lord was to take place on no more conspicuous stage than the soul of man; that his kingdom would be established in the surrendered will. A poem, the precious distillation of such a character and such a life as his through all those sorrowing but undespondent years, must have a meaning in it which few men have and questions whether he was there in the renewed spirit only or in the flesh also: —

“If I was merely *what of me thou newly*
Createdst, Love, who governest the heavens,
 Thou knowest, who didst lift me with thy light!”
 (*Paradiso*, i. 73-75.)

¹ *Paradiso*, ii. 7. Lucretius makes the same boast: —

“Avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
 Trita solo.”

² *Convito*, tratt. ii. c. 15.

meaning enough in themselves wholly to penetrate. That its allegorical form belongs to a past fashion, with which the modern mind has little sympathy, we should no more think of denying than of whitewashing a fresco of Giotto. But we may take it as we may Nature, which is also full of double meanings, either as picture or as parable, either for the simple delight of its beauty or as a shadow of the spiritual world. We may take it as we may history, either for its picturesqueness or its moral, either for the variety of its figures, or as a witness to that perpetual presence of God in his creation of which Dante was so profoundly sensible. He had seen and suffered much, but it is only to the man who is himself of value that experience is valuable. He had not looked on man and Nature as most of us do, with less interest than into the columns of our daily newspaper. He saw in them the latest authentic news of the God who made them, for he carried everywhere that vision washed clear with tears which detects the meaning under the mask, and, beneath the casual and transitory, the eternal keeping its sleepless watch. The secret of Dante's power is not far to seek. Whoever can express *himself* with the full force of unconscious sincerity will be found to have uttered something ideal and universal. Dante intended a didactic poem, but the most picturesque of poets could not escape

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his genius, and his sermon sings and glows and charms in a manner that surprises more at the fiftieth reading than the first, such variety of freshness is in imagination.

There are no doubt in the "Divina Commedia" (regarded merely as poetry) sandy spaces enough both of physics and metaphysics, but with every deduction Dante remains the first of descriptive as well as moral poets. His verse is as various as the feeling it conveys; now it has the terseness and edge of steel, and now palpitates with iridescent softness like the breast of a dove. In vividness he is without a rival. He drags back by its tangled locks the unwilling head of some petty traitor of an Italian provincial town, lets the fire glare on the sullen face for a moment, and it sears itself into the memory forever. He shows us an angel glowing with that love of God which makes him a star even amid the glory of heaven, and the holy shape keeps lifelong watch in our fantasy, constant as a sentinel. He has the skill of conveying impressions indirectly. In the gloom of hell his bodily presence is revealed by his stirring something, on the mount of expiation by casting a shadow. Would he have us feel the brightness of an angel? He makes him whiten afar through the smoke like a dawn,¹ or, walking

¹ *Purgatorio*, xvi. 142. Here is Milton's "Far off his coming shone."

straight toward the setting sun, he finds his eyes suddenly unable to withstand a greater splendor against which his hand is unavailing to shield him. Even its reflected light, then, is brighter than the direct ray of the sun.¹ And how much more keenly do we feel the parched lips of Master Adam for those rivulets of the Casentino which run down into the Arno, "making their channels cool and soft"! His comparisons are as fresh, as simple, and as directly from Nature as those of Homer.² Sometimes they show a more subtle observation, as where he compares the stooping of Antæus over him to the leaning tower of Carisenda, to which the clouds, flying in an opposite direction to its inclination, give away their motion.³ His suggestions of individuality, too, from attitude or speech, as in Farinata, Sordello, or Pia,⁴ give in a hint what

¹ *Purgatorio*, xv. 7, et seq.

² See, for example, *Inferno*, xvii. 127-132; *ibid.* xxiv. 7-12; *Purgatorio*, ii. 124-129; *ibid.* iii. 79-84; *ibid.* xxvii. 76-81; *Paradiso*, xix. 91-93; *ibid.* xxi. 34-39; *ibid.* xxiii. 1-9.

³ *Inferno*, xxxi. 136-138.

"And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars."

(Coleridge, *Dejection, an Ode.*)

See also the comparison of the dimness of the faces seen around him in Paradise to "a pearl on a white forehead." (*Paradiso*, iii. 14.)

⁴ *Inferno*, x. 35-41; *Purgatorio*, vi. 61-66; *ibid.* x. 133.

is worth acres of so-called character-painting. In straightforward pathos, the single and sufficient thrust of phrase, he has no competitor. He is too sternly touched to be effusive and tearful :

“Io non piangeva, sì dentro impietrai.”¹

His is always the true coin of speech,—

“Sì lucida e sì tonda

Che nel suo conio nulla ci s’ inforsa,”—

and never the highly ornamented promise to pay, token of insolvency.

No doubt it is primarily by his poetic qualities that a poet must be judged, for it is by these, if by anything, that he is to maintain his place in literature. And he must be judged by them absolutely, with reference, that is, to the highest standard, and not relatively to the fashions and opportunities of the age in which he lived. Yet these considerations must fairly enter into our decision of another side of the question, and one that has much to do with the true quality of the man, with his character as distinguished from his talent, and therefore with how much he will influence men as well as delight them. We may reckon up pretty exactly a man’s advantages and defects as an artist; these he has in common with others, and they are to be measured by a recog-

¹ For example, Cavalcanti’s *Come dicesti egli ebbe?* (*Inferno*, x. 67, 68.) Anselmuccio’s *Tu guardi sì, padre, che hai?* (*Inferno*, xxxiii. 51.)

nized standard ; but there is something in his *genius* that is incalculable. It would be hard to define the causes of the difference of impression made upon us respectively by two such men as Æschylus and Euripides, but we feel profoundly that the latter, though in some respects a better dramatist, was an infinitely lighter weight. Æschylus stirs something in us far deeper than the sources of mere pleasurable excitement. The man behind the verse is far greater than the verse itself, and the impulse he gives to what is deepest and most sacred in us, though we cannot always explain it, is none the less real and lasting. Some men always seem to remain outside their work ; others make their individuality felt in every part of it ; their very life vibrates in every verse, and we do not wonder that it has "made them lean for many years." The virtue that has gone out of them abides in what they do. The book such a man makes is indeed, as Milton called it, "the precious lifeblood of a master spirit." Theirs is a true immortality, for it is their soul, and not their talent, that survives in their work. Dante's concise forthrightness of phrase, which to that of most other poets is as a stab¹ to a blow with a cudgel, the vigor of his thought, the beauty of his images, the refinement of his conception of

¹ To the "bestiality" of certain arguments Dante says, "one would wish to reply, not with words, but with a knife." (*Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 14.)

spiritual things, are marvellous if we compare him with his age and its best achievement. But it is for his power of inspiring and sustaining, it is because they find in him a spur to noble aims, a secure refuge in that defeat which the present always seems, that they prize Dante who know and love him best. He is not merely a great poet, but an influence, part of the soul's resources in time of trouble. From him she learns that, "married to the truth, she is a mistress, but otherwise a slave shut out of all liberty."¹

All great poets have their message to deliver us, from something higher than they. We venture on no unworthy comparison between him who reveals to us the beauty of this world's love and the grandeur of this world's passion and him who shows that love of God is the fruit whereof all other loves are but the beautiful and fleeting blossom, that the passions are yet sublimer objects of contemplation, when, subdued by the will, they become patience in suffering and perseverance in the upward path. But we cannot help thinking that if Shakespeare be the most comprehensive intellect, so Dante is the highest spiritual nature that has expressed itself in rhythmical form. Had he merely made us feel how petty the ambitions, sorrows, and vexations of earth appear when looked down on from the heights of our own character and the seclu-

¹ *Convito*, tratt. iv. c. 2.

sion of our own genius, or from the region where we commune with God, he had done much :—

“ I with my sight returned through one and all
The sevenfold spheres, and I beheld this globe
Such that I smiled at its ignoble semblance.”¹

But he has done far more ; he has shown us the way by which that country far beyond the stars may be reached, may become the habitual dwelling-place and fortress of our nature, instead of being the object of its vague aspiration in moments of indolence. At the Round Table of King Arthur there was left always one seat empty for him who should accomplish the adventure of the Holy Grail. It was called the perilous seat because of the dangers he must encounter who would win it. In the company of the epic poets there was a place left for whoever should embody the Christian idea of a triumphant life, outwardly all defeat, inwardly victorious, who should make us partakers of that cup of sorrow in which all are communicants with Christ. He who should do this would indeed achieve the perilous seat, for he must combine poesy with doctrine in such cunning wise that the one lose not its beauty nor the other its severity, — and Dante has done it. As he takes possession of it we seem to hear the cry he himself heard when Virgil rejoined the company of great singers, —

“ All honor to the loftiest of poets ! ”

¹ *Paradiso*, xxii. 132-135; *ibid.* xxvii. 110.

WORDSWORTH

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1875

A GENERATION has now passed away since Wordsworth was laid with the family in the churchyard at Grasmere.¹ Perhaps it is hardly yet time to take a perfectly impartial measure of his value as a poet. To do this is especially hard for those who are old enough to remember the last shot which the foe was sullenly firing in that long war of critics which began when he published his manifesto as Pretender, and which came to a pause rather than to an end when they flung up their caps with the rest at his final coronation. Something of the intensity of the *odium theologicum* (if indeed the *aestheticum* be not in these days the more bitter of the two) entered into the conflict. The Wordsworthians were a sect, who, if they had the enthusiasm, had also not a little of the

¹ "I pay many little visits to the family in the churchyard at Grasmere," writes James Dixon (an old servant of Wordsworth) to Crabb Robinson, with a simple, one might almost say canine pathos, thirteen years after his wife's death. Wordsworth was always considerate and kind with his servants, Robinson tells us.

exclusiveness and partiality to which sects are liable. The verses of the master had for them the virtue of religious canticles stimulant of zeal and not amenable to the ordinary tests of cold-blooded criticism. Like the hymns of the Huguenots and Covenanters, they were songs of battle no less than of worship, and the combined ardors of conviction and conflict lent them a fire that was not naturally their own. As we read them now, that virtue of the moment is gone out of them, and whatever of Dr. Wattsiness there is gives us a slight shock of disenchantment. It is something like the difference between the "Marseillaise" sung by armed propagandists on the edge of battle, or by Brissotins in the tumbrel, and the words of it read coolly in the closet, or recited with the factitious frenzy of Thérèse. It was natural in the early days of Wordsworth's career to dwell most fondly on those profounder qualities to appreciate which settled in some sort the measure of a man's right to judge of poetry at all. But now we must admit the shortcomings, the failures, the defects as no less essential elements in forming a sound judgment as to whether the seer and artist were so united in him as to justify the claim first put in by himself and afterwards maintained by his sect to a place beside the few great poets who exalt men's minds, and give a right direction and safe outlet to their passions through the imagination,

William Wordsworth



while insensibly helping them toward balance of character and serenity of judgment by stimulating their sense of proportion, form, and the nice adjustment of means to ends. In none of our poets has the constant propulsion of an unbending will, and the concentration of exclusive, if I must not say somewhat narrow, sympathies done so much to make the original endowment of Nature effective, and in none accordingly does the biography throw so much light on the works, or enter so largely into their composition as an element whether of power or of weakness. Wordsworth never saw, and I think never wished to see, beyond the limits of his own consciousness and experience. He early conceived himself to be, and through life was confirmed by circumstances in the faith that he was, a "dedicated spirit,"¹ a state of mind likely to further an intense but at the same time one-sided development of the intellectual powers. The solitude in which the greater part of his mature life was passed, while it doubtless ministered to the passionate intensity of his musings upon man and Nature, was, it may be suspected,

¹ In the *Prelude* he attributes this consecration to a sunrise seen (during a college vacation) as he walked homeward from some village festival where he had danced all night: —

"My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit." (Bk. iv.)

harmful to him as an artist, by depriving him of any standard of proportion outside himself by which to test the comparative value of his thoughts, and by rendering him more and more incapable of that urbanity of mind which could be gained only by commerce with men more nearly on his own level, and which gives tone without lessening individuality. Wordsworth never quite saw the distinction between the eccentric and the original. For what we call originality seems not so much anything peculiar, much less anything odd, but that quality in a man which touches human nature at most points of its circumference, which reinvigorates the consciousness of our own powers by recalling and confirming our own unvalued sensations and perceptions, gives classic shape to our own amorphous imaginings, and adequate utterance to our own stammering conceptions or emotions. The poet's office is to be a Voice, not of one crying in the wilderness to a knot of already magnetized acolytes, but singing amid the throng of men, and lifting their common aspirations and sympathies (so first clearly revealed to themselves) on the wings of his song to a purer ether and a wider reach of view. We cannot, if we would, read the poetry of Wordsworth as mere poetry; at every other page we find ourselves entangled in a problem of æsthetics. The world-old question of matter and form,

of whether nectar *is* of precisely the same flavor when served to us from a Grecian chalice or from any jug of ruder pottery, comes up for decision anew. The Teutonic nature has always shown a sturdy preference of the solid bone with a marrow of nutritious moral to any shadow of the same on the flowing mirror of sense. Wordsworth never lets us long forget the deeply rooted stock from which he sprang, — *vien ben dà lui*.

William Wordsworth was born at Cocker-mouth in Cumberland, on the 7th of April, 1770, the second of five children. His father was John Wordsworth, an attorney-at-law, and agent of Sir James Lowther, afterwards first Earl of Lonsdale. His mother was Anne Cookson, the daughter of a mercer in Penrith. His paternal ancestors had been settled immemorially at Penistone in Yorkshire, whence his grandfather had emigrated to Westmoreland. His mother, a woman of piety and wisdom, died in March, 1778, being then in her thirty-second year. His father, who never entirely cast off the depression occasioned by her death, survived her but five years, dying in December, 1783, when William was not quite fourteen years old.

The poet's early childhood was passed partly at Cockermouth, and partly with his maternal

grandfather at Penrith. His first teacher appears to have been Mrs. Anne Birkett, a kind of Shennstone's Schoolmistress, who practised the memory of her pupils, teaching them chiefly by rote, and not endeavoring to cultivate their reasoning faculties, a process by which children are apt to be converted from natural logicians into impertinent sophists. Among his schoolmates here was Mary Hutchinson, who afterwards became his wife.

In 1778 he was sent to a school founded by Edwin Sandys, Archbishop of York,¹ in the year 1585, at Hawkshead in Lancashire. Hawkshead is a small market-town in the vale of Esthwaite, about a third of a mile northwest of the lake. Here Wordsworth passed nine years, among a people of simple habits and scenery of a sweet and pastoral dignity. His earliest intimacies were with the mountains, lakes, and streams of his native district, and the associations with which his mind was stored during its most impressible period were noble and pure. The boys were boarded among the dames of the village, thus enjoying a freedom from scholastic restraints, which could be nothing but beneficial in a place where the temptations were

¹ Father of George Sandys, treasurer of the Virginia Company, translator, while in Virginia, of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and author of a book of travels in the East dear to Dr. Johnson.

only to sports that hardened the body while they fostered a love of nature in the spirit and habits of observation in the mind. Wordsworth's ordinary amusements here were hunting and fishing, rowing, skating, and long walks around the lake and among the hills, with an occasional scamper on horseback.¹ His life as a schoolboy was favorable also to his poetic development, in being identified with that of the people among whom he lived. Among men of simple habits, and where there are small diversities of condition, the feelings and passions are displayed with less restraint, and the young poet grew acquainted with that primal human basis of character where the Muse finds firm foothold, and to which he ever afterward cleared his way through all the overlying drift of conventionalism. The dalesmen were a primitive and hardy race who kept alive the traditions and often the habits of a more picturesque time. A common level of interests and of social standing fostered unconventional ways of thought and speech, and friendly human sympathies. Solitude induced reflection, a reliance of the mind on its own resources, and individuality of character. Where everybody knew everybody, and everybody's father had known everybody's father, the interest of man in man was not likely to become a matter of cold hearsay and distant report.

¹ *Prelude*, bk. II.

When death knocked at any door in the hamlet, there was an echo from every fireside, and a wedding dropt its white flowers at every threshold. There was not a grave in the churchyard but had its story; not a crag or glen or aged tree untouched with some ideal hue of legend. It was here that Wordsworth learned that homely humanity which gives such depth and sincerity to his poems. Travel, society, culture, nothing could obliterate the deep trace of that early training which enables him to speak directly to the primitive instincts of man. He was apprenticed early to the difficult art of being himself.

At school he wrote some task-verses on subjects imposed by the master, and also some voluntaries of his own, equally undistinguished by any peculiar merit. But he seems to have made up his mind as early as in his fourteenth year to become a poet.¹ "It is recorded," says his biographer vaguely, "that the poet's father set him very early to learn portions of the best English poets by heart, so that at an early age he could repeat large portions of Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser."²

¹ "I to the muses have been bound,
These fourteen years, by strong indentures."

(*Idiot Boy*, 1798.)

² I think this more than doubtful, for I find no traces of the influence of any of these poets in his earlier writings. Goldsmith was evidently his model in the *Descriptive Sketches* and the *Evening Walk*. I speak of them as originally printed.

The great event of Wordsworth's school-days was the death of his father, who left what may be called a hypothetical estate, consisting chiefly of claims upon the first Earl of Lonsdale, the payment of which, though their justice was acknowledged, that nobleman contrived in some unexplained way to elude so long as he lived. In October, 1787, he left school for St. John's College, Cambridge. He was already, we are told, a fair Latin scholar, and had made some progress in mathematics. The earliest books we hear of his reading were "Don Quixote," "Gil Blas," "Gulliver's Travels," and the "Tale of a Tub"; but at school he had also become familiar with the works of some English poets, particularly Goldsmith and Gray, of whose poems he had learned many by heart. What is more to the purpose, he had become, without knowing it, a lover of Nature in all her moods, and the same mental necessities of a solitary life which compel men to an interest in the transitory phenomena of scenery had made him also studious of the movements of his own mind, and the mutual interaction and dependence of the external and internal universe.

Doubtless his early orphanage was not without its effect in confirming a character naturally impatient of control, and his mind, left to itself, clothed itself with an indigenous growth, which

grew fairly and freely, unstinted by the shadow of exotic plantations. It has become a truism, that remarkable persons have remarkable mothers ; but perhaps this is chiefly true of such as have made themselves distinguished by their industry, and by the assiduous cultivation of faculties in themselves of only an average quality. It is rather to be noted how little is known of the parentage of men of the first magnitude, how often they seem in some sort foundlings, and how early an apparently adverse destiny begins the culture of those who are to encounter and master great intellectual or spiritual experiences.

Of his disposition as a child little is known, but that little is characteristic. He himself tells us that he was "stiff, moody, and of violent temper." His mother said of him that he was the only one of her children about whom she felt any anxiety, — for she was sure that he would be remarkable for good or evil. Once, in resentment at some fancied injury, he resolved to kill himself, but his heart failed him. I suspect that few boys of passionate temperament have escaped these momentary suggestions of despairing helplessness. "On another occasion," he says, "while I was at my grandfather's house at Penrith, along with my eldest brother Richard, we were whipping tops together in the long drawing-room, on which the

carpet was only laid down on particular occasions. The walls were hung round with family pictures, and I said to my brother, 'Dare you strike your whip through that old lady's petticoat?' He replied, 'No, I won't.' 'Then,' said I, 'here goes,' and I struck my lash through her hooped petticoat, for which, no doubt, though I have forgotten it, I was properly punished. But, possibly from some want of judgment in punishments inflicted, I had become perverse and obstinate in defying chastisement, and rather proud of it than otherwise." This last anecdote is as happily typical as a bit of Greek mythology which always prefigured the lives of heroes in the stories of their childhood. Just so do we find him afterward striking his defiant lash through the hooped petticoat of the artificial style of poetry, and proudly unsubdued by the punishment of the Reviewers.

Of his college life the chief record is to be found in "The Prelude." He did not distinguish himself as a scholar, and if his life had any incidents, they were of that interior kind which rarely appear in biography, though they may be of controlling influence upon the life. He speaks of reading Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton while at Cambridge,¹ but no reflection

¹ *Prelude*, bk. iii. He studied Italian also at Cambridge; his teacher, whose name was Isola, had formerly taught the poet Gray. It may be pretty certainly inferred, however, that

from them is visible in his earliest published poems. The greater part of his vacations was spent in his native Lake Country, where his only sister, Dorothy, was the companion of his rambles. She was a woman of large natural endowments, chiefly of the receptive kind, and had much to do with the formation and tendency of the poet's mind. It was she who called forth the shyer sensibilities of his nature, and taught an originally harsh and austere imagination to surround itself with fancy and feeling, as the rock fringes itself with a sun-spray of ferns. She was his first Public, and belonged to that class of prophetically appreciative temperaments whose apparent office it is to cheer the early solitude of original minds with messages from the future. Through the greater part of his life she continued to be a kind of poetical conscience to him.

Wordsworth's last college vacation was spent in a foot journey upon the Continent (1790). In January, 1791, he took his degree of B. A., and left Cambridge. During the summer of this year he visited Wales, and, after declining to enter upon holy orders under the plea that

his first systematic study of English poetry was due to the copy of Anderson's *British Poets*, left with him by his sailor brother John on setting out for his last voyage in 1805. It was the daughter of this Isola, Emma, who was afterwards adopted by Charles and Mary Lamb.

he was not of age for ordination, went over to France in November, and remained during the winter at Orléans. Here he became intimate with the republican General Beaupuis, with whose hopes and aspirations he ardently sympathized. In the spring of 1792 he was at Blois, and returned thence to Orléans, which he finally quitted in October for Paris. He remained here as long as he could with safety, and at the close of the year went back to England, thus, perhaps, escaping the fate which soon after overtook his friends the Brissotins.

As hitherto the life of Wordsworth may be called a fortunate one, not less so in the training and expansion of his faculties was this period of his stay in France. Born and reared in a country where the homely and familiar nestles confidently amid the most savage and sublime forms of Nature, he had experienced whatever impulses the creative faculty can receive from mountain and cloud and the voices of winds and waters, but he had known man only as an actor in fireside histories and tragedies, for which the hamlet supplied an ample stage. In France he first felt the authentic beat of a nation's heart; he was a spectator at one of those dramas where the terrible footfall of the Eumenides is heard nearer and nearer in the pauses of the action; and he saw man such as he can only be when he is vibrated by the orgasm of a national emo-

tion. He sympathized with the hopes of France and of mankind deeply, as was fitting in a young man and a poet; and if his faith in the gregarious advancement of men was afterward shaken, he only held the more firmly by his belief in the individual, and his reverence for the human as something quite apart from the popular and above it. Wordsworth has been unwisely blamed, as if he had been recreant to the liberal instincts of his youth. But it was inevitable that a genius so regulated and metrical as his, a mind which always compensated itself for its artistic radicalism by an involuntary leaning toward external respectability, should recoil from whatever was convulsionary and destructive in politics, and above all in religion. He reads the poems of Wordsworth without understanding, who does not find in them the noblest incentives to faith in man and the grandeur of his destiny, founded always upon that personal dignity and virtue, the capacity for whose attainment alone makes universal liberty possible and assures its permanence. He was to make men better by opening to them the sources of an inalterable well-being; to make them free, in a sense higher than political, by showing them that these sources are within them, and that no contrivance of man can permanently emancipate narrow natures and depraved minds. His politics were always those of a poet, circling in the

larger orbit of causes and principles, careless of the transitory oscillation of events.

The change in his point of view (if change there was) certainly was complete soon after his return from France, and was perhaps due in part to the influence of Burke.

“ While he [Burke] forewarns, denounces, launches forth,
Against all systems built on abstract rights,
Keen ridicule; the majesty proclaims
Of institutes and laws hallowed by time;
Declares the vital power of social ties
Endeared by custom; and with high disdain,
Exploding upstart theory, insists
Upon the allegiance to which men are born.
. . . Could a youth, and one
In ancient story versed, whose breast hath heaved
Under the weight of classic eloquence,
Sit, see, and hear, unthankful, uninspired ? ”¹

He had seen the French for a dozen years eagerly busy in tearing up whatever had roots in the past, replacing the venerable trunks of tradition and orderly growth with liberty-poles, then striving vainly to piece together the fibres they had broken, and to reproduce artificially that sense of permanence and continuity which is the main safeguard of vigorous self-consciousness in a nation. He became a Tory through

¹ *Prelude*, bk. vii. Written before 1805, and referring to a still earlier date. “ Wordsworth went in powder, and with cocked hat under his arm, to the Marchioness of Stafford’s rout.” (Southey to Miss Barker, May, 1806.)

intellectual conviction, retaining, I suspect, to the last, a certain radicalism of temperament and instinct. As in Carlyle, so in him something of the peasant survived to the last. Haydon tells us that in 1809 Sir George Beaumont said to him and Wilkie, "Wordsworth may perhaps walk in; if he do, I caution you both against his terrific democratic notions"; and it must have been many years later that Wordsworth himself told Crabb Robinson, "I have no respect whatever for Whigs, but I have a great deal of the Chartist in me." In 1802, during his tour in Scotland, he travelled on Sundays as on the other days of the week.¹ He afterwards became a theoretical churchgoer. "Wordsworth defended earnestly the Church establishment. He even said he would shed his blood for it. Nor was he disconcerted by a laugh raised against him on account of his having confessed that he knew not when he had been in a church in his own country. 'All our ministers are so vile,' said he. The mischief of allowing the clergy to depend on the caprice of the multitude he thought more than outweighed all the evils of an establishment."²

In December, 1792, Wordsworth had re-

¹ This was probably one reason for the long suppression of Miss Wordsworth's journal, which she had evidently prepared for publication as early as 1805.

² Crabb Robinson, i. 250, Am. ed.

turned to England, and in the following year published "Descriptive Sketches" and the "Evening Walk." He did this, as he says in one of his letters, to show that, although he had gained no honors at the University, he *could* do something. They met with no great success, and he afterward corrected them so much as to destroy all their interest as juvenile productions, without communicating to them any of the merits of maturity. In commenting, sixty years afterward, on a couplet in one of these poems, —

"And, fronting the bright west, the oak entwines

Its darkening boughs and leaves in stronger lines," —

he says: "This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. . . . The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them, and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency."

It is plain that Wordsworth's memory was playing him a trick here, misled by that instinct (it may almost be called) of consistency which leads men first to desire that their lives should have been without break or seam, and then to believe that they have been such. The more distant ranges of perspective are apt to run together in retrospection. How far could Words-

worth at fourteen have been acquainted with the poets of all ages and countries, — he who to his dying day could not endure to read Goethe and knew nothing of Calderon? It seems to me rather that the earliest influence traceable in him is that of Goldsmith, and later of Cowper, and it is, perhaps, some slight indication of its having already begun that his first volume of "Descriptive Sketches" (1793) was put forth by Johnson, who was Cowper's publisher. By and by the powerful impress of Burns is seen both in the topics of his verse and the form of his expression. But whatever the ultimate effect of these poets upon his style, certain it is that his juvenile poems were clothed in the conventional habit of the eighteenth century. "The first verses from which he remembered to have received great pleasure were Miss Carter's 'Poem on Spring,' a poem in the six-line stanza which he was particularly fond of and had composed much in, — for example, 'Ruth.'" This is noteworthy, for Wordsworth's lyric range, especially so far as tune is concerned, was always narrow. His sense of melody was painfully dull, and some of his lighter effusions, as he would have called them, are almost ludicrously wanting in grace of movement. We cannot expect in a modern poet the thrush-like improvisation, the bewitchingly impulsive cadences, that charm us in our Elizabethan drama and whose last warble

died with Herrick ; but Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning have shown that the simple pathos of their music was not irrecoverable, even if the artless poignancy of their phrase be gone beyond recall. We feel this lack in Wordsworth all the more keenly if we compare such verses as

“ Like an army defeated
The snow hath retreated
And now doth fare ill
On the top of the bare hill ”

with Goethe's exquisite “ Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,” in which the lines (as if shaken down by a momentary breeze of emotion) drop lingeringly one after another like blossoms upon turf.

The “ Evening Walk ” and “ Descriptive Sketches ” show plainly the prevailing influence of Goldsmith, both in the turn of thought and the mechanism of the verse. They lack altogether the temperance of tone and judgment in selection which have made the “ Traveller ” and the “ Deserted Village,” perhaps the most truly classical poems in the language. They bear here and there, however, the unmistakable stamp of the maturer Wordsworth, not only in a certain blunt realism, but in the intensity and truth of picturesque epithet. Of this realism, from which Wordsworth never wholly freed himself, the following verses may suffice as a specimen. After describing the fate of a chamois-hunter killed by

falling from a crag, his fancy goes back to the bereaved wife and son: —

“Haply that child in fearful doubt may gaze,
Passing his father’s bones in future days,
Start at the reliques of that very thigh
On which so oft he prattled when a boy.”

In these poems there is plenty of that “poetic diction” against which Wordsworth was to lead the revolt nine years later.

“To wet the peak’s impracticable sides
He opens of his feet the sanguine tides,
Weak and more weak the issuing current eyes
Lapped by the panting tongue of thirsty skies.”

Both of these passages have disappeared from the revised edition, as well as some curious outbursts of that motiveless despair which Byron made fashionable not long after. Nor are there wanting touches of fleshliness which strike us oddly as coming from Wordsworth.¹

“Farewell! those forms that in thy noontide shade
Rest near their little plots of oaten glade,
Those steadfast eyes that beating breasts inspire
To throw the ‘sultry ray’ of young Desire;
Those lips whose tides of fragrance come and go
Accordant to the cheek’s unquiet glow;
Those shadowy breasts in love’s soft light arrayed,
And rising by the moon of passion swayed.”

¹ Wordsworth’s purity afterwards grew sensitive almost to prudery. The late Mr. Clough told me that he heard him at Dr. Arnold’s table denounce the first line in Keats’s *Ode to a Grecian Urn* as indecent, and Haydon records that when he saw the group of Cupid and Psyche he exclaimed, “The dev-ils!”

The political tone is also mildened in the revision, as where he changes "despot courts" into "tyranny." One of the alterations is interesting. In the "Evening Walk" he had originally written —

"And bids her soldier come her wars to share
Asleep on Minden's charnel hill afar."

An *erratum* at the end directs us to correct the second verse, thus : —

"Asleep on Bunker's charnel hill afar."†

Wordsworth somewhere rebukes the poets for making the owl a bodeful bird. He had himself done so in the "Evening Walk," and corrects his epithets to suit his later judgment, putting "gladsome" for "boding" and replacing

"The tremulous sob of the complaining owl"
by

"The sportive outcry of the mocking owl."

Indeed, the character of the two poems is so much changed in the revision as to make the dates appended to them a misleading anachronism. But there is one truly Wordsworthian passage which already gives us a glimpse of that passion with which he was the first to irradiate

† The whole passage is omitted in the revised edition. The original, a quarto pamphlet, is now very rare, but fortunately Charles Lamb's copy of it is now owned by my friend Professor C. E. Norton.

descriptive poetry, and which sets him on a level with Turner.

“ ’T is storm; and hid in mist from hour to hour
All day the floods a deepening murmur pour;
The sky is veiled and every cheerful sight;
Dark is the region as with coming night;
But what a sudden burst of overpowering light!
Triumphant on the bosom of the storm,
Glances the fire-clad eagle’s wheeling form;
Eastward, in long prospective glittering shine
The wood-crowned cliffs that o’er the lake recline;
Those eastern cliffs a hundred streams unfold,
At once to pillars turned that flame with gold;
Behind his sail the peasant tries to shun
The West that burns like one dilated sun,
Where in a mighty crucible expire
The mountains, glowing hot like coals of fire.”

Wordsworth has made only one change in these verses, and that for the worse, by substituting “glorious” (which was already implied in “glances” and “fire-clad”) for “wheeling.” In later life he would have found it hard to forgive the man who should have made cliffs recline over a lake. On the whole, what strikes us as most prophetic in these poems is their want of continuity, and the purple patches of true poetry on a texture of unmistakable prose; perhaps we might add the incongruous clothing of prose thoughts in the ceremonial robes of poesy.

During the same year (1793) he wrote, but did not publish, a political tract, in which he

avowed himself opposed to monarchy and to the hereditary principle, and desirous of a republic, if it could be had without a revolution. He probably continued to be all his life in favor of that ideal republic "which never was on land or sea," but fortunately he gave up politics that he might devote himself to his own nobler calling, to which politics are subordinate, and for which he found freedom enough in England as it was.¹ Dr. Wordsworth admits that his uncle's opinions were democratical so late as 1802. I suspect that they remained so in an esoteric way

¹ Wordsworth showed his habitual good sense in never sharing, so far as is known, the communistic dreams of his friends Coleridge and Southey. The latter of the two had, to be sure, renounced them shortly after his marriage, and before his acquaintance with Wordsworth began. But Coleridge seems to have clung to them longer. There is a passage in one of his letters to Cottle (without date, but apparently written in the spring of 1798) which would imply that Wordsworth had been accused of some kind of social heresy. "Wordsworth has been caballed against *so long and so loudly* that he has found it impossible to prevail on the tenant of the Allfoxden estate to let him the house after their first agreement is expired." Perhaps, after all, it was Wordsworth's insulation of character and habitual want of sympathy with anything but the moods of his own mind that rendered him incapable of this copartnery of enthusiasm. He appears to have regarded even his sister Dorothy (whom he certainly loved as much as it was possible for him to love anything but his own poems) as a kind of tributary dependency of his genius, much as a mountain might look down on one of its ancillary spurs.

to the end of his days. He had himself suffered by the arbitrary selfishness of a great landholder, and he was born and bred in a part of England where there is a greater social equality than elsewhere. The look and manner of the Cumberland people especially are such as recall very vividly to a New Englander the associations of fifty years ago, ere the change from New England to New Ireland had begun. But meanwhile, Want, which makes no distinctions of Monarchist or Republican, was pressing upon him. The debt due to his father's estate had not been paid, and Wordsworth was one of those rare idealists who esteem it the first duty of a friend of humanity to live for, and not on, his neighbor. He at first proposed establishing a periodical journal to be called "The Philanthropist," but luckily went no further with it, for the receipts from an organ of opinion which professed republicanism, and at the same time discounted the plans of all existing or defunct republicans, would have been necessarily scanty. There being no appearance of any demand, present or prospective, for philanthropists, he tried to get employment as correspondent of a newspaper. Here also it was impossible that he should succeed; he was too great to be merged in the editorial We, and had too well defined a private opinion on all subjects to be able to express that average of public opinion which

constitutes able editorials. But so it is that to the prophet in the wilderness the birds of ill omen are already on the wing with food from heaven; and while Wordsworth's relatives were getting impatient at what they considered his waste of time, while one thought he had gifts enough to make a good parson, and another lamented the rare attorney that was lost in him,¹ the prescient muse guided the hand of Raisley Calvert while he wrote the poet's name in his will

¹ Speaking to one of his neighbors in 1845 he said, "that, after he had finished his college course, he was in great doubt as to what his future employment should be. He did not feel himself good enough for the Church; he felt that his mind was not properly disciplined for that holy office, and that the struggle between his conscience and his impulses would have made life a torture. He also shrank from the Law, although Southey often told him that he was well fitted for the higher parts of the profession. He had studied military history with great interest, and the strategy of war; and he always fancied that he had talents for command; and he at one time thought of a military life, but then he was without connections, and he felt, if he were ordered to the West Indies, his talents would not save him from the yellow fever, and he gave that up." (*Memoirs*, ii. 466.) It is curious to fancy Wordsworth a soldier. Certain points of likeness between him and Wellington have often struck me. They resemble each other in practical good sense, fidelity to duty, courage, and also in a kind of precise uprightness which made their personal character somewhat uninteresting. But what was decorum in Wellington was piety in Wordsworth, and the entire absence of imagination (the great point of dissimilarity) perhaps helped as much as anything to make Wellington a great commander.

for a legacy of £900. By the death of Calvert, in 1795, this timely help came to Wordsworth at the turning-point of his life, and made it honest for him to write poems that will never die, instead of theatrical critiques as ephemeral as play-bills, or leaders that led only to oblivion.

In the autumn of 1795 Wordsworth and his sister took up their abode at Racedown Lodge, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. Here nearly two years were passed, chiefly in the study of poetry, and Wordsworth to some extent recovered from the fierce disappointment of his political dreams, and regained that equable tenor of mind which alone is consistent with a healthy productiveness. Here Coleridge, who had contrived to see something more in the "Descriptive Sketches" than the public had discovered there, first made his acquaintance. The sympathy and appreciation of an intellect like Coleridge's supplied him with that external motive to activity which is the chief use of popularity, and justified to him his opinion of his own powers. It was now that the tragedy of "The Borderers" was for the most part written, and that plan of the "Lyrical Ballads" suggested which gave Wordsworth a clue to lead him out of the metaphysical labyrinth in which he was entangled. It was agreed between the two young friends that Wordsworth was to be a philosophic poet, and, by a good fortune uncommon to such

conspiracies, Nature had already consented to the arrangement. In July, 1797, the two Wordsworths removed to Allfoxden in Somersetshire, that they might be near Coleridge, who in the mean while had married and settled himself at Nether-Stowey. In November "The Borderers" was finished, and Wordsworth went up to London with his sister to offer it for the stage. The good Genius of the poet again interposing, the play was decisively rejected, and Wordsworth went back to Allfoxden, himself the hero of that first tragi-comedy so common to young authors.

The play has fine passages, but is as unreal as "Jane Eyre." It shares with many of Wordsworth's narrative poems the defect of being written to illustrate an abstract moral theory, so that the overbearing thesis is continually thrusting the poetry to the wall. Applied to the drama, such predestination makes all the personages puppets and disenables them for being characters. Wordsworth seems to have felt this when he published "The Borderers" in 1842, and says in a note that it was "at first written . . . without any view to its exhibition upon the stage." But he was mistaken. The contemporaneous letters of Coleridge to Cottle show that he was long in giving up the hope of getting it accepted by some theatrical manager.

He now applied himself to the preparation

of the first volume of the "Lyrical Ballads" for the press, and it was published toward the close of 1798. The book, which contained also "The Ancient Mariner" of Coleridge, attracted little notice, and that in great part contemptuous. When Mr. Cottle, the publisher, shortly after sold his copyrights to Mr. Longman, that of the "Lyrical Ballads" was reckoned at *zero*, and it was at last given up to the authors. A few persons were not wanting, however, who discovered the dawn-streaks of a new day in that light which the critical fire-brigade thought to extinguish with a few contemptuous spurts of cold water.¹

Lord Byron describes himself as waking one morning and finding himself famous, and it is quite an ordinary fact that a blaze may be made with a little saltpetre that will be stared at by

¹ Cottle says, "The sale was so slow and the severity of most of the reviews so great that its progress to oblivion seemed to be certain." But the notices in the *Monthly* and *Critical* reviews (then the most influential) were fair, and indeed favorable, especially to Wordsworth's share in the volume. The *Monthly* says, "So much genius and originality are discovered in this publication that we wish to see another from the same hand." The *Critical*, after saying that "in the whole range of English poetry we scarcely recollect anything superior to a passage in *Lines written near Tintern Abbey*," sums up thus: "Yet every piece discovers genius; and ill as the author has frequently employed his talents, they certainly rank him with the best of living poets." Such treatment surely cannot be called discouraging.

thousands who would have thought the sunrise tedious. If we may believe his biographer, Wordsworth might have said that he awoke and found himself in-famous, for the publication of the "Lyrical Ballads" undoubtedly raised him to the distinction of being the least popular poet in England. Parnassus has two peaks; the one where improvising poets cluster; the other where the singer of deep secrets sits alone, — a peak veiled sometimes from the whole morning of a generation by earth-born mists and smoke of kitchen fires, only to glow the more consciously at sunset, and after night-fall to crown itself with imperishable stars. Wordsworth had that self-trust which in the man of genius is sublime, and in the man of talent insufferable. It mattered not to him though all the reviewers had been in a chorus of laughter or a conspiracy of silence behind him. He went quietly over to Germany to write more Lyrical Ballads, and to begin a poem on the growth of his own mind, at a time when there were only two men in the world (himself and Coleridge) who were aware that he had one in anywise differing from those, mechanically uniform, which are stuck drearily, side by side, in the great pin-paper of society.

In Germany Wordsworth dined in company with Klopstock, and after dinner they had a conversation, of which Wordsworth took notes.

The respectable old poet, who was passing the evening of his days by the chimney-corner, Darby and Joan like, with his respectable Muse, seems to have been rather bewildered by the apparition of a living genius. The record is of value now chiefly for the insight it gives us into Wordsworth's mind. Among other things he said, "that it was the province of a great poet to raise people up to his own level, not to descend to theirs," — memorable words, the more memorable that a literary life of sixty years was in keeping with them.

It would be instructive to know what were Wordsworth's studies during his winter in Goslar. De Quincey's statement is mere conjecture. It may be guessed fairly enough that he would seek an entrance to the German language by the easy path of the ballad, a course likely to confirm him in his theories as to the language of poetry. The Spinozism with which he has been not unjustly charged was certainly not due to any German influence, for it appears unmistakably in the "Lines composed at Tintern Abbey" in July, 1798. It is more likely to have been derived from his talks with Coleridge in 1797.¹ When Emerson visited him in 1833, he

¹ A very improbable story of Coleridge's in the *Biographia Literaria* represents the two friends as having incurred a suspicion of treasonable dealings with the French enemy by their constant references to a certain "Spy Nosey." The story at

spoke with loathing of "Wilhelm Meister," a part of which he had read in Carlyle's translation apparently. There was some affectation in this, it should seem, for he had read Smollett. On the whole, it may be fairly concluded that the help of Germany in the development of his genius may be reckoned as very small, though there is certainly a marked resemblance both in form and sentiment between some of his earlier lyrics and those of Goethe. His poem of the "Thorn," though vastly more imaginative, may have been suggested by Bürger's "Pfarrer's Tochter von Taubenhain." The little grave *drei Spannen lang*, in its conscientious measurement, certainly recalls a famous couplet in the English poem.

After spending the winter at Goslar, Wordsworth and his sister returned to England in the spring of 1799, and settled at Grasmere in Westmoreland. In 1800, the first edition of the "Lyrical Ballads" being exhausted, it was republished with the addition of another volume, Mr. Longman paying £100 for the copyright of two editions. The book passed to a second edition in 1802, and to a third in 1805.¹

least seems to show how they pronounced the name, which was exactly in accordance with the usage of the last generation in New England.

¹ Wordsworth found (as other original minds have since done) a hearing in America sooner than in England. James

Wordsworth sent a copy of it, with a manly letter, to Mr. Fox, particularly recommending to his attention the poems "Michael" and "The Brothers," as displaying the strength and permanence among a simple and rural population of those domestic affections which were certain to decay gradually under the influence of manufactories and poor-houses. Mr. Fox wrote a civil acknowledgment, saying that his favorites among the poems were "Harry Gill," "We are Seven," "The Mad Mother," and "The Idiot," but that he was prepossessed against the use of blank verse for simple subjects. Any political significance in the poems he was apparently unable to see. To this second edition Wordsworth prefixed an argumentative Preface, in which he nailed to the door of the cathedral of English song the critical theses which he was to maintain against all comers in his poetry and his life. It was a new thing for an author to undertake to show the goodness of his verses by the logic and learning of his prose; but Wordsworth carried to the reform of poetry all that fervor and faith which had lost their political object, and it

Humphreys, a Philadelphia bookseller, was encouraged by a sufficient *list of subscribers* to reprint the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The second English edition, however, having been published before he had wholly completed his reprinting, was substantially followed in the first American, which was published in 1802.

is another proof of the sincerity and greatness of his mind, and of that heroic simplicity which is their concomitant, that he could do so calmly what was sure to seem ludicrous to the greater number of his readers. Fifty years have since demonstrated that the true judgment of one man outweighs any counterpoise of false judgment, and that the faith of mankind is guided to a man only by a well-founded faith in himself. To this *Defensio* Wordsworth afterward added a supplement, and the two form a treatise of permanent value for philosophic statement and decorous English. Their only ill effect has been, that they have encouraged many otherwise deserving young men to set a Sibylline value on their verses in proportion as they were unsalable. The strength of an argument for self-reliance drawn from the example of a great man depends wholly on the greatness of him who uses it; such arguments being like coats of mail, which, though they serve the strong against arrow-flights and lance-thrusts, may only suffocate the weak or sink him the sooner in the waters of oblivion.

An advertisement prefixed to the "Lyrical Ballads," as originally published in one volume, warned the reader that "they were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far *the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society* is adapted to the purposes of poetic

pleasure." In his Preface to the second edition, in two volumes, Wordsworth already found himself forced to shift his ground a little (perhaps in deference to the wider view and finer sense of Coleridge), and now says of the former volume that "it was published as an experiment which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement *a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation*, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted which a poet may *rationaly endeavor* to impart." ¹ Here is evidence of a retreat towards a safer position, though Wordsworth seems to have remained unconvinced at heart, and for many years longer clung obstinately to the passages of bald prose into which his original theory had betrayed him. In 1815 his opinions had undergone a still further change, and an assiduous study of the qualities of his own mind and of his own poetic method (the two subjects in which alone he was ever a thorough scholar) had convinced him that poetry was in no sense that appeal to the understanding which is implied by the words "*rationaly endeavor to impart.*" In the preface of that year he says, "The observations prefixed to that portion of these volumes which was pub-

¹ Some of the weightiest passages in this Preface, as it is now printed, were inserted without notice of date in the edition of 1815.

lished many years ago under the title of 'Lyrical Ballads' have so little of special application to the greater part of the present enlarged and diversified collection, that they could not with propriety stand as an introduction to it." It is a pity that he could not have become an earlier convert to Coleridge's pithy definition, that "prose was words in their best order, and poetry the *best* words in the best order." But idealization was something that Wordsworth was obliged to learn painfully. It did not come to him naturally, as to Spenser and Shelley, and to Coleridge in his higher moods. Moreover, it was in the too frequent choice of subjects incapable of being idealized without a manifest jar between theme and treatment that Wordsworth's great mistake lay. For example, in "The Blind Highland Boy" he had originally the following stanzas:—

"Strong is the current, but be mild,
Ye waves, and spare the hapless child!
If ye in anger fret or chafe,
A bee-hive would be ship as safe
As that in which he sails.

"But say, what was it? Thought of fear!
Well may ye tremble when ye hear!
— A household tub like one of those
Which women use to wash their clothes,
This carried the blind boy."

In endeavoring to get rid of the downright

vulgarity of phrase in the last stanza, Wordsworth invents an impossible tortoise-shell, and thus robs his story of the reality which alone gave it a living interest. Any extemporized raft would have floated the boy down to immortality. But Wordsworth never quite learned the distinction between Fact, which suffocates the Muse, and Truth, which is the very breath of her nostrils. Study and self-culture did much for him, but they never quite satisfied him that he was capable of making a mistake. He yielded silently to friendly remonstrance on certain points, and gave up, for example, the ludicrous exactness of

"I've measured it from side to side,
'T is three feet long and two feet wide."

But I doubt if he was ever really convinced, and to his dying day he could never quite shake off that habit of over-minute detail which renders the narratives of uncultivated people so tedious, and sometimes so distasteful.¹ "Simon Lee," after his latest revision, still contains verses like these: —

¹ "On my alluding to the line —

'Three feet long and two feet wide' —

and confessing that I dared not read them aloud in company, he said, 'They ought to be liked.' " (Crabb Robinson, 9th May, 1815.) His ordinary answer to criticisms was that he considered the power to appreciate the passage criticised as a test of the critic's capacity to judge of poetry at all.

“And he is lean and he is sick;
His body, dwindled and awry,
Rests upon ankles swollen and thick;
His legs are thin and dry;
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Few months of life he has in store,
As he to you will tell,
For still the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell,” —

which are not only prose, but *bad* prose, and moreover guilty of the same fault for which Wordsworth condemned Dr. Johnson's famous parody on the ballad style, — that their “*matter* is contemptible.” The sonorousness of conviction with which Wordsworth sometimes gives utterance to commonplaces of thought and trivialities of sentiment has a ludicrous effect on the profane and even on the faithful in unguarded moments. We are reminded of a passage in “The Excursion”: —

“List ! I heard
From yon huge breast of rock a solemn bleat,
Sent forth as if it were the mountain's voice.”

In 1800 the friendship of Wordsworth with Lamb began, and was thenceforward never interrupted. He continued to live at Grasmere, conscientiously diligent in the composition of poems, secure of finding the materials of glory within and around him; for his genius taught him that inspiration is no product of a foreign shore, and that no adventurer ever found it,

though he wandered as long as Ulysses. Meanwhile the appreciation of the best minds and the gratitude of the purest hearts gradually centred more and more towards him. In 1802 he made a short visit to France, in company with Miss Wordsworth, and soon after his return to England was married to Mary Hutchinson, on the 4th of October of the same year. Of the good fortune of this marriage no other proof is needed than the purity and serenity of his poems, and its record is to be sought nowhere else.

On the 18th of June, 1803, his first child, John, was born, and on the 14th of August of the same year he set out with his sister on a foot journey into Scotland. Coleridge was their companion during a part of this excursion, of which Miss Wordsworth kept a full diary. In Scotland he made the acquaintance of Scott, who recited to him a part of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," then in manuscript. The travellers returned to Grasmere on the 25th of September. It was during this year that Wordsworth's intimacy with the excellent Sir George Beaumont began. Sir George was an amateur painter of considerable merit, and his friendship was undoubtedly of service to Wordsworth in making him familiar with the laws of a sister art and thus contributing to enlarge the sympathies of his criticism, the tendency of which was toward

too great exclusiveness. Sir George Beaumont, dying in 1827, did not forego his regard for the poet, but contrived to hold his affection in mortmain by the legacy of an annuity of £100, to defray the charges of a yearly journey.

In March, 1805, the poet's brother, John, lost his life by the shipwreck of the Abergavenny East-Indiaman, of which he was captain. He was a man of great purity and integrity, and sacrificed himself to his sense of duty by refusing to leave the ship till it was impossible to save him. Wordsworth was deeply attached to him, and felt such grief at his death as only solitary natures like his are capable of, though mitigated by a sense of the heroism which was the cause of it. The need of mental activity as affording an outlet to intense emotion may account for the great productiveness of this and the following year. He now completed "The Prelude," wrote "The Waggoner," and increased the number of his smaller poems enough to fill two volumes, which were published in 1807.

This collection, which contained some of the most beautiful of his shorter pieces, and among others the incomparable Odes to Duty and on Immortality, did not reach a second edition till 1815. The reviewers had another laugh, and rival poets pillaged while they scoffed, particularly Byron, among whose verses a bit of Wordsworth showed as incongruously as a sacred vestment

on the back of some buccaneering plunderer of an abbey.¹ There was a general combination to put him down, but on the other hand there was a powerful party in his favor, consisting of William Wordsworth. He not only continued in good heart himself, but, reversing the order usual on such occasions, kept up the spirits of his friends.² Meanwhile the higher order of

¹ Byron, then in his twentieth year, wrote a review of these volumes, not, on the whole, unfair. Crabb Robinson is reported as saying that Wordsworth was indignant at the *Edinburgh Review's* attack on *Hours of Idleness*. "The young man will do something if he goes on," he said.

² The Rev. Dr. Wordsworth has encumbered the memory of his uncle with two volumes of *Memoirs*, which for confused dreariness are only matched by the Rev. Mark Noble's *History of the Protectorate House of Cromwell*. It is a misfortune that his materials were not put into the hands of Professor Reed, whose notes to the American edition are among the most valuable parts of it, as they certainly are the clearest. The book contains, however, some valuable letters of Wordsworth; and those relating to this part of his life should be read by every student of his works, for the light they throw upon the principles which governed him in the composition of his poems. In a letter to Lady Beaumont (May 21, 1807) he says, "Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny! — to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves.

minds among his contemporaries had descried and acknowledged him. They see their peer over the mist and lower summits between.

“When Plinlimon hath a cap,
Snowdon wots well of that.”

Wordsworth passed the winter of 1806-7 in a house of Sir George Beaumont's, at Coleorton in Leicestershire, the cottage at Grasmere having become too small for his increased family. On his return to the Vale of Grasmere he rented the house at Allan Bank, where he lived three years. During this period he appears to have written very little poetry, for which his biographer assigns as a primary reason the smokiness of the Allan Bank chimneys. This will hardly account for the failure of the summer crop, especially as Wordsworth composed chiefly in the open air. It did not prevent him from writing a pamphlet upon the Convention of Cintra, which was pub-

. . . To conclude, my ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz [of hostile criticism], and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings; and, after what I have said, I am sure yours will be the same. I doubt not that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings (and among them these little poems) will coöperate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society wherever found; and that they will in their degree be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier.” Here is an odd reversal of the ordinary relation between an unpopular poet and his little public of admirers; it is he who keeps up their spirits, and supplies them with faith from his own inexhaustible cistern.

lished too late to attract much attention, though Lamb says that its effect upon him was like that which one of Milton's tracts might have had upon a contemporary.¹ It was at Allan Bank that Coleridge dictated "The Friend," and Wordsworth contributed to it two essays, one in answer to a letter of Mathetes² (Professor Wilson), and the other on Epitaphs, republished in the Notes to "The Excursion." Here also he wrote his "Description of the Scenery of the Lakes." Perhaps a truer explanation of the comparative silence of Wordsworth's Muse during these years is to be found in the intense interest which he took in current events, whose variety, picturesqueness, and historical significance were enough to absorb all the energies of his imagination.

In the spring of 1811 Wordsworth removed to the Parsonage at Grasmere. Here he remained two years, and here he had his second intimate experience of sorrow in the loss of two of his children, Catharine and Thomas, one of whom died 4th June, and the other 1st Decem-

¹ "Wordsworth's pamphlet will fail of producing any general effect, because the sentences are long and involved, and his friend De Quincey, who corrected the press, has rendered them more obscure by an unusual system of punctuation." (Southey to Scott, 30th July, 1809.) The tract is, as Southey hints, heavy.

² The first essay in the third volume of the second edition.

ber, 1812.¹ Early in 1813 he bought Rydal Mount, and, having removed thither, changed his abode no more during the rest of his life. In March of this year he was appointed Distributor of Stamps for the county of Westmoreland, an office whose receipts rendered him independent, and whose business he was able to do by deputy, thus leaving him ample leisure for nobler duties. De Quincey speaks of this appointment as an instance of the remarkable good luck which waited upon Wordsworth through his whole life. In our view it is only another illustration of that scripture which describes the righteous as never forsaken. Good luck is the willing handmaid of upright, energetic character, and conscientious observance of duty. Wordsworth owed his nomination to the friendly exertions of the Earl of Lonsdale, who desired to atone as far as might be for the injustice of the first Earl, and who respected the honesty of the man more than he appreciated the originality of the poet.² The Collectorship at Whitehaven (a

¹ Wordsworth's children were, —

John, born 18th June, 1803, a clergyman.

Dorothy, born 16th August, 1804; died 9th July, 1847.

Thomas, born 16th June, 1806; died 1st December, 1812.

Catharine, born 6th September, 1808; died 4th June, 1812.

William, born 12th May, 1810; succeeded his father as Stamp-Distributor.

² Good luck (in the sense of *Chance*) seems properly to be the occurrence of Opportunity to one who has neither

more lucrative office) was afterwards offered to Wordsworth, and declined. He had enough for independence, and wished nothing more. Still later, on the death of the Stamp-Distributor for Cumberland, a part of that district was annexed to Westmoreland, and Wordsworth's income was raised to something more than £1000 a year.

In 1814 he made his second tour in Scotland, visiting Yarrow in company with the Ettrick Shepherd. During this year "The Excursion" was published, in an edition of five hundred copies, which supplied the demand for six years. Another edition of the same number of copies was published in 1827, and not exhausted till 1834. In 1815 "The White Doe of Rylstone" appeared, and in 1816 "A Letter to a Friend of Burns," in which Wordsworth gives his opinion upon the limits to be observed by the biographers of literary men. It contains many valuable suggestions, but allows hardly scope enough for personal details, to which he was constitutionally indifferent.¹ Nearly the same deserved nor knows how to use it. In such hands it commonly turns to ill luck. Moore's Bermudan appointment is an instance of it. Wordsworth had a sound common sense and practical conscientiousness, which enabled him to fill his office as well as Dr. Franklin could have done. A fitter man could not have been found in Westmoreland.

¹ "I am not one who much or oft delight
In personal talk."

date may be ascribed to a rhymed translation of the first three books of the "*Æneid*," a specimen of which was printed in the Cambridge "Philological Museum" (1832). In 1819 "*Peter Bell*," written twenty years before, was published, and, perhaps in consequence of the ridicule of the reviewers, found a more rapid sale than any of his previous volumes. "*The Waggoner*," printed in the same year, was less successful. His next publication was the volume of *Sonnets on the river Duddon*, with some miscellaneous poems, 1820. A tour on the Continent in 1820 furnished the subjects for another collection, published in 1822. This was followed in the same year by the volume of "*Ecclesiastical Sketches*." His subsequent publications were "*Yarrow Revisited*," 1835, and the tragedy of "*The Borderers*," 1842.

During all these years his fame was increasing slowly but steadily, and his age gathered to itself the reverence and the troops of friends which his poems and the nobly simple life reflected in them deserved. Public honors followed private appreciation. In 1838 the University of Dublin conferred upon him the degree of D. C. L. In 1839 Oxford did the same, and the reception of the poet (now in his seventieth year) at the University was enthusiastic. In 1842 he resigned his office of Stamp-Distributor, and Sir Robert Peel had the honor of putting him upon

the civil list for a pension of £300. In 1843 he was appointed Laureate, with the express understanding that it was a tribute of respect, involving no duties except such as might be self-imposed. His only official production was an Ode for the installation of Prince Albert as Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. His life was prolonged yet seven years, almost, it should seem, that he might receive that honor which he had truly conquered for himself by the unflinching bravery of a literary life of half a century, unparalleled for the scorn with which its labors were received, and the victorious acknowledgment which at last crowned them. Surviving nearly all his contemporaries, he had, if ever any man had, a foretaste of immortality, enjoying in a sort his own posthumous renown, for the hardy slowness of its growth gave a safe pledge of its durability. He died on the 23d of April, 1850, the anniversary of the death of Shakespeare.

We have thus briefly sketched the life of Wordsworth, — a life uneventful even for a man of letters ; a life like that of an oak, of quiet self-development, throwing out stronger roots toward the side whence the prevailing storm-blasts blow, and a tougher fibre in proportion to the rocky nature of the soil in which it grows. The life and growth of his mind, and the influences which shaped it, are to be looked for, even

more than is the case with most poets, in his works, for he deliberately recorded them there.

Of his personal characteristics little is related. He was somewhat above the middle height, but, according to De Quincey, of indifferent figure, the shoulders being narrow and drooping. His finest feature was the eye, which was gray and full of spiritual light. Leigh Hunt says: "I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired, so supernatural. They were like fires, half burning, half smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixture of regard. One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes." Southey tells us that he had no sense of smell, and Haydon that he had none of form. The best likeness of him, in De Quincey's judgment, is the portrait of Milton prefixed to Richardson's notes on "Paradise Lost." He was active in his habits, composing in the open air, and generally dictating his poems. His daily life was regular, simple, and frugal; his manners were dignified and kindly; and in his letters and recorded conversations it is remarkable how little that was personal entered into his judgment of contemporaries.

The true rank of Wordsworth among poets is, perhaps, not even yet to be fairly estimated, so hard is it to escape into the quiet hall of judgment uninflamed by the tumult of partisanship which besets the doors.

Coming to manhood, predetermined to be a great poet, at a time when the artificial school of poetry was enthroned with all the authority of long succession and undisputed legitimacy, it was almost inevitable that Wordsworth, who, both by nature and judgment, was a rebel against the existing order, should become a partisan. Unfortunately, he became not only the partisan of a system, but of William Wordsworth as its representative. Right in general principle, he thus necessarily became wrong in particulars. Justly convinced that greatness only achieves its ends by implicitly obeying its own instincts, he perhaps reduced the following his instincts too much to a system, mistook his own resentments for the promptings of his natural genius, and, compelling principle to the measure of his own temperament or even of the controversial exigency of the moment, fell sometimes into the error of making naturalness itself artificial. If a poet resolve to be original, it will end commonly in his being merely peculiar.

Wordsworth himself departed more and more in practice, as he grew older, from the theories which he had laid down in his prefaces ;¹ but

¹ How far he swung backward toward the school under whose influence he grew up, and toward the style against which he had protested so vigorously, a few examples will show. The advocate of the language of common life has a verse in his *Thanksgiving Ode* which, if one met with it by

those theories undoubtedly had a great effect in retarding the growth of his fame. He had carefully constructed a pair of spectacles through which his earlier poems were to be studied, and the public insisted on looking through them at his mature works, and were consequently unable to see fairly what required a different focus. He forced his readers to come to his poetry with a certain amount of conscious preparation, and thus gave them beforehand the impression of something like mechanical artifice, and deprived them of the contented repose of implicit faith. To the child a watch seems to be a living creature; but Wordsworth would not let his readers be children, and did injustice to himself by giving them an uneasy doubt whether creations

itself, he would think the achievement of some later copyist of Pope: —

“While the *tubed engine* [the organ] feels the inspiring blast.”

And in *The Italian Itinerant and the Swiss Goatherd* we find a thermometer or barometer called

“The well-wrought scale
Whose sentient tube instructs to time
A purpose to a fickle clime.”

Still worse in the *Eclipse of the Sun*, 1821: —

“High on her speculative tower
Stood Science, waiting for the hour
When Sol was destined to endure
That darkening.”

So in *The Excursion*, —

“The cold March wind raised in her tender throat
Viewless obstructions.”

which really throbbed with the very heart's-blood of genius, and were alive with Nature's life of life, were not contrivances of wheels and springs. A naturalness which we are told to expect has lost the crowning grace of Nature. The men who walked in Cornelius Agrippa's visionary gardens had probably no more pleasurable emotion than that of a shallow wonder, or an equally shallow self-satisfaction in thinking they had hit upon the secret of the thaumaturgy ; but to a tree that has grown as God willed we come without a theory and with no botanical predilections, enjoying it simply and thankfully ; or the Imagination re-creates for us its past summers and winters, the birds that have nested and sung in it, the sheep that have clustered in its shade, the winds that have visited it, the cloudbergs that have drifted over it, and the snows that have ermined it in winter. The Imagination is a faculty that flouts at foreordination, and Wordsworth seemed to do all he could to cheat his readers of her company by laying out paths with a peremptory *Do not step off the gravel!* at the opening of each, and preparing pitfalls for every conceivable emotion, with guide-boards to tell each when and where it must be caught.

But if these things stood in the way of immediate appreciation, he had another theory which interferes more seriously with the total and permanent effect of his poems. He was

theoretically determined not only to be a philosophic poet, but to be a *great* philosophic poet, and to this end he must produce an epic. Leaving aside the question whether the epic be obsolete or not, it may be doubted whether the history of a single man's mind is universal enough in its interest to furnish all the requirements of the epic machinery, and it may be more than doubted whether a poet's philosophy be ordinary metaphysics, divisible into chapter and section. It is rather something which is more energetic in a word than in a whole treatise, and our hearts uncloseth themselves instinctively at its simple *Open sesame!* while they would stand firm against the reading of the whole body of philosophy. In point of fact, the one element of greatness which "The Excursion" possesses indisputably is heaviness. It is only the episodes that are universally read, and the effect of these is diluted by the connecting and accompanying lectures on metaphysics. Wordsworth had his epic mould to fill, and, like Benvenuto Cellini in casting his Perseus, was forced to throw in everything, debasing the metal lest it should run short. Separated from the rest, the episodes are perfect poems in their kind, and without example in the language.

Wordsworth, like most solitary men of strong minds, was a good critic of the substance of poetry, but somewhat niggardly in the allow-

ance he made for those subsidiary qualities which make it the charmer of leisure and the employment of minds without definite object. It may be doubted, indeed, whether he set much store by any contemporary writing but his own, and whether he did not look upon poetry too exclusively as an exercise rather of the intellect than as a nepenthe of the imagination.¹ He says of himself, speaking of his youth:—

“ In fine,

I was a better judge of thoughts than words,
 Mised in estimating words, not only
 By common inexperience of youth,
 But by the trade in classic niceties,
 The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
 From languages that want the living voice
 To carry meaning to the natural heart;
 To tell us what is passion, what is truth,
 What reason, what simplicity and sense.”²

Though he here speaks in the preterite tense, this was always true of him, and his thought seems often to lean upon a word too weak to bear its weight. No reader of adequate insight can help regretting that he did not earlier give himself to “the trade of classic niceties.” It was precisely this which gives to the blank verse of Landor the severe dignity and reserved force which alone among later poets recall the tune

¹ According to Landor, he pronounced all Scott’s poetry to be “not worth five shillings.”

² *Prelude*, bk. iv.

of Milton, and to which Wordsworth never attained. Indeed, Wordsworth's blank verse (though the passion be profounder) is always essentially that of Cowper. They were alike also in their love of outward nature and of simple things. The main difference between them is one of scenery rather than of sentiment, between the lifelong familiar of the mountains and the dweller on the plain.

It cannot be denied that in Wordsworth the very highest powers of the poetic mind were associated with a certain tendency to the diffuse and commonplace. It is in the understanding (always prosaic) that the great golden veins of his imagination are embedded.¹ He wrote too much to write always well; for it is not a great Xerxes army of words, but a compact Greek ten thousand, that march safely down to posterity. He set tasks to his divine faculty, which is much the same as trying to make Jove's eagle do the service of a clucking hen. Throughout "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" he seems

¹ This was instinctively felt, even by his admirers. Miss Martineau said to Crabb Robinson in 1839, speaking of Wordsworth's conversation: "Sometimes he is annoying from the pertinacity with which he dwells on trifles; at other times he flows on in the utmost grandeur, leaving a strong impression of inspiration." Robinson tells us that he read *Resolution and Independence* to a lady who was affected by it even to tears, and then said, "I have not heard anything for years that so much delighted me; but, *after all, it is not poetry.*"

striving to bind the wizard Imagination with the sand-ropes of dry disquisition, and to have forgotten the potent spell-word which would make the particles cohere. There is an arenaceous quality in the style which makes progress wearisome. Yet with what splendors as of mountain sunsets are we rewarded! what golden rounds of verse do we not see stretching heavenward with angels ascending and descending! what haunting harmonies hover around us deep and eternal like the undying barytone of the sea! and if we are compelled to fare through sands and desert wildernesses, how often do we not hear airy shapes that syllable our names with a startling personal appeal to our highest consciousness and our noblest aspiration, such as we wait for in vain in any other poet! Landor, in a letter to Miss Holford, says admirably of him, "Common minds alone can be ignorant what breadth of philosophy, what energy and intensity of thought, what insight into the heart, and what observation of Nature are requisite for the production of such poetry."

Take from Wordsworth all which an honest criticism cannot but allow, and what is left will show how truly great he was. He had no humor, no dramatic power, and his temperament was of that dry and juiceless quality, that in all his published correspondence you shall not find a letter, but only essays. If we consider care-

fully where he was most successful, we shall find that it was not so much in description of natural scenery, or delineation of character, as in vivid expression of the effect produced by external objects and events upon his own mind, and of the shape and hue (perhaps momentary) which they in turn took from his mood or temperament. His finest passages are always monologues. He had a fondness for particulars, and there are parts of his poems which remind us of local histories in the undue relative importance given to trivial matters. He was the historian of Wordsworthshire. This power of particularization (for it is as truly a power as generalization) is what gives such vigor and greatness to single lines and sentiments of Wordsworth, and to poems developing a single thought or sentiment. It was this that made him so fond of the sonnet. That sequestered nook forced upon him the limits which his fecundity (if I may not say his garrulity) was never self-denying enough to impose on itself. It suits his solitary and meditative temper, and it was there that Lamb (an admirable judge of what was permanent in literature) liked him best. Its narrow bounds, but fourteen paces from end to end, turn into a virtue his too common fault of giving undue prominence to every passing emotion. He excels in monologue, and the law of the sonnet tempers monologue with mercy.

In "The Excursion" we are driven to the subterfuge of a French verdict of extenuating circumstances. His mind had not that reach and elemental movement of Milton's, which, like the trade-wind, gathered to itself thoughts and images like stately fleets from every quarter; some deep with silks and spicery, some brooding over the silent thunders of their battailous armaments, but all swept forward in their destined track, over the long billows of his verse, every inch of canvas strained by the unifying breath of their common epic impulse. It was an organ that Milton mastered, mighty in compass, capable equally of the trumpet's ardors or the slim delicacy of the flute, and sometimes it bursts forth in great crashes through his prose, as if he touched it for solace in the intervals of his toil. If Wordsworth sometimes put the trumpet to his lips, yet he lays it aside soon and willingly for his appropriate instrument, the pastoral reed. And it is not one that grew by any vulgar stream, but that which Apollo breathed through, tending the flocks of Admetus, — that which Pan endowed with every melody of the visible universe, — the same in which the soul of the despairing nymph took refuge and gifted with her dual nature, — so that ever and anon, amid the notes of human joy or sorrow, there comes suddenly a deeper and almost awful tone, thrilling us into dim consciousness of a forgotten divinity.

Wordsworth's absolute want of humor, while it no doubt confirmed his self-confidence by making him insensible both to the comical incongruity into which he was often led by his earlier theory concerning the language of poetry and to the not unnatural ridicule called forth by it, seems to have been indicative of a certain dulness of perception in other directions.* We

* Nowhere is this displayed with more comic self-complacency than when he thought it needful to rewrite the ballad of *Helen of Kirconnel*, — a poem hardly to be matched in any language for swiftness of movement and savage sincerity of feeling. Its shuddering compression is masterly.

"Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
And curst the hand that fired the shot,
When in my arms burd Helen dropt,
That died to succor me !

"O, think ye not my heart was sair
When my love dropt down and spake na mair ?"

Compare this with —

"Proud Gordon cannot bear the thoughts
That through his brain are travelling,
And, starting up, to Bruce's heart
He launched a deadly javelin;

Fair Ellen saw it when it came,
And, *stepping forth to meet the same*,
Did with her body cover
The Youth, her chosen lover.

And Bruce (*as soon as he had slain
The Gordon*) sailed away to Spain,
And fought with rage incessant
Against the Moorish Crescent."

These are surely the verses of an attorney's clerk "penning a stanza when he should engross." It will be noticed that

cannot help feeling that the material of his nature was essentially prose, which, in his inspired moments, he had the power of transmuting, but which, whenever the inspiration failed or was factitious, remained obstinately leaden. The normal condition of many poets would seem to approach that temperature to which Wordsworth's mind could be raised only by the white heat of profoundly inward passion. And in proportion to the intensity needful to make his

Wordsworth here also departs from his earlier theory of the language of poetry by substituting a javelin for a bullet as less modern and familiar. Had he written —

“ And Gordon never gave a hint,
But, having somewhat picked his flint,
Let fly the fatal bullet
That killed that lovely pullet,” —

it would hardly have seemed more like a parody than the rest. He shows the same insensibility in a note upon the *Ancient Mariner* in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*: “The poem of my friend has indeed great defects; first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of mariner, or as a human being who, having been long under the control of supernatural impressions, might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act, but is continually acted upon; thirdly, that the events, having no necessary connection, do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat laboriously accumulated.” Here is an indictment, to be sure, and drawn, plainly enough, by the attorney's clerk aforementioned. One would think that the strange charm of Coleridge's most truly original poems lay in this very emancipation from the laws of cause and effect.

nature thoroughly aglow is the very high quality of his best verses. They seem rather the productions of Nature than of man, and have the lastingness of such, delighting our age with the same startle of newness and beauty that pleased our youth. Is it his thought? It has the shifting inward lustre of diamond. Is it his feeling? It is as delicate as the impressions of fossil ferns. He seems to have caught and fixed forever in immutable grace the most evanescent and intangible of our intuitions, the very ripple-marks on the remotest shores of being. But this intensity of mood which insures high quality is by its very nature incapable of prolongation, and Wordsworth, in endeavoring it, falls more below himself, and is, more even than many poets his inferiors in imaginative quality, a poet of passages. Indeed, one cannot help having the feeling sometimes that the poem is there for the sake of these passages, rather than that these are the natural jets and elations of a mind energized by the rapidity of its own motion. In other words, the happy couplet or gracious image seems not to spring from the inspiration of the poem conceived as a whole, but rather to have dropped of itself into the mind of the poet in one of his rambles, who then, in a less rapt mood, has patiently built up around it a setting of verse too often ungraceful in form and of a material whose cheapness may cast a doubt on

the priceless quality of the gem it encumbers.¹ During the most happily productive period of his life, Wordsworth was impatient of what may be called the mechanical portion of his art. His wife and sister seem from the first to have been his scribes. In later years, he had learned and often insisted on the truth that poetry was an art no less than a gift, and corrected his poems in cold blood, sometimes to their detriment. But he certainly had more of the vision than of the faculty divine, and was always a little numb on the side of form and proportion. Perhaps his best poem in these respects is the "Lao-damia," and it is not uninstrusive to learn from his own lips that "it cost him more trouble than almost anything of equal length he had ever written." His longer poems (miscalled epical) have no more intimate bond of union than their more or less immediate relation to his own personality. Of character other than his own he had but a faint conception, and all the personages of "The Excursion" that are not Wordsworth are the merest shadows of himself upon mist, for his self-concentrated

¹ "A hundred times when, roving high and low,
I have been harassed with the toil of verse,
Much pains and little progress, and at once
Some lovely Image in the song rose up,
Full-formed, like Venus rising from the sea."

Prelude, bk. iv.

nature was incapable of projecting itself into the consciousness of other men and seeing the springs of action at their source in the recesses of individual character. The best parts of these longer poems are bursts of impassioned soliloquy, and his fingers were always clumsy at the *callida junctura*. The stream of narration is sluggish, if varied by times with pleasing reflections (*viridesque placido aequore sylvas*) ; we are forced to do our own rowing, and only when the current is hemmed in by some narrow gorge of the poet's personal consciousness do we feel ourselves snatched along on the smooth but impetuous rush of unmistakable inspiration. The fact that what is precious in Wordsworth's poetry was (more truly even than with some greater poets than he) a gift rather than an achievement should always be borne in mind in taking the measure of his power. I know not whether to call it height or depth, this peculiarity of his, but it certainly endows those parts of his work which we should distinguish as Wordsworthian with an unexpectedness and impressiveness of originality such as we feel in the presence of Nature herself. He seems to have been half conscious of this, and recited his own poems to all comers with an enthusiasm of wondering admiration that would have been profoundly comic¹ but for its simple sincerity and for the

¹ Mr. Emerson tells us that he was at first tempted to smile,

fact that William Wordsworth, Esquire, of Rydal Mount, was one person, and the William Wordsworth whom he so heartily revered quite another. We recognize two voices in him, as Stephano did in Caliban. There are Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch. If the prophet cease from dictating, the amanuensis, rather than be idle, employs his pen in jotting down some anecdotes of his master, how he one day went out and saw an old woman, and the next day did *not*, and so came home and dictated some verses on this ominous phenomenon, and how another day he saw a cow. These marginal annotations have been carelessly taken up into the text, have been religiously held by the pious to be orthodox scripture, and by dexterous exegesis have been made to yield deeply oracular meanings. Presently the real prophet takes up the word again and speaks as one divinely inspired, the Voice of a higher and invisible power. Wordsworth's better utterances have the bare sincerity, the absolute abstraction from time and place, the immunity from decay, that belong to the grand simplicities of the Bible. They seem not more his own than ours and every man's, the word

and Mr. Ellis Yarnall (who saw him in his eightieth year) says, "These quotations [from his own works] he read in a way that much impressed me; it seemed almost as if he were *awed by the greatness of his own power, the gifts with which he had been endowed.*" (The italics are mine.)

of the inalterable Mind. This gift of his was naturally very much a matter of temperament, and accordingly by far the greater part of his finer product belongs to the period of his prime, ere Time had set his lumpish foot on the pedal that deadens the nerves of animal sensibility.¹ He did not grow as those poets do in whom the artistic sense is predominant. One of the most delightful fancies of the Genevese humorist, Toepffer, is the poet Albert, who, having had his portrait drawn by a highly idealizing hand, does his best afterwards to look like it. Many of Wordsworth's later poems seem like rather unsuccessful efforts to resemble his former self. They would never, as Sir John Harrington says

¹ His best poetry was written when he was under the immediate influence of Coleridge. Coleridge seems to have felt this, for it is evidently to Wordsworth that he alludes when he speaks of "those who have been so well pleased that I should, year after year, flow with a hundred nameless rills into *their* main stream." (*Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. C.*, vol. i. pp. 5, 6.) "Wordsworth found fault with the repetition of the concluding sound of the participles in Shakespeare's line about bees: —

" 'The singing masons building roofs of gold.'"

This, he said, was a line that Milton never would have written. Keats thought, on the other hand, that the repetition was in harmony with the continued note of the singers." (Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*.) Wordsworth writes to Crabb Robinson in 1837, "My ear is susceptible to the clashing of sounds almost to disease." One cannot help thinking that his training in these niceties was begun by Coleridge.

of poetry, "keep a child from play and an old man from the chimney-corner."¹

Chief Justice Marshall once blandly interrupted a junior counsel who was arguing certain obvious points of law at needless length, by saying, "Brother Jones, there are *some* things which a Supreme Court of the United States sitting in equity may be presumed to know." Wordsworth has this fault of enforcing and restating obvious points till the reader feels as if his own intelligence were somewhat underrated. He is over-conscientious in giving us full measure, and once profoundly absorbed in the sound of his own voice, he knows not when to stop. If he feel himself flagging, he has a droll way of keeping the floor, as it were, by asking himself a series of questions sometimes not needing, and often incapable of answer. There are three stanzas of such near the close of the First Part of "Peter Bell," where Peter first catches a glimpse of the dead body in the water, all happily incongruous, and ending with one which reaches the height of comicality:—

"Is it a fiend that to a stake
Of fire his desperate self is tethering?
Or stubborn spirit doomed to yell,
In solitary ward or cell,
Ten thousand miles from all his brethren?"

The same want of humor which made him

¹ In the Preface to his translation of the *Orlando Furioso*.

insensible to incongruity may perhaps account also for the singular unconsciousness of disproportion which so often strikes us in his poetry. For example, a little farther on in "Peter Bell" we find: —

"Now — like a tempest-shattered bark
That overwhelmed and prostrate lies,
And in a moment to the verge
Is lifted of a foaming surge —
Full suddenly the Ass doth rise!"

And one cannot help thinking that the similes of the huge stone, the sea-beast, and the cloud, noble as they are in themselves, are somewhat too lofty for the service to which they are put.¹

The movement of Wordsworth's mind was too slow and his mood too meditative for narrative poetry. He values his own thoughts and reflections too much to sacrifice the least of them to the interests of his story. Moreover, it is never action that interests him, but the subtle motives that lead to or hinder it. "The Waggoner" involuntarily suggests a comparison with "Tam O'Shanter" infinitely to its own disadvantage. "Peter Bell," full though it be of profound touches and subtle analysis, is lumbering and disjointed. Even Lamb was forced to confess that he did not like it. "The White Doe," the most Wordsworthian of them all in the best meaning of the epithet, is also only the more

¹ In *Resolution and Independence*.

truly so for being diffuse and reluctant. What charms in Wordsworth and will charm forever is the

“ Happy tone
Of meditation slipping in between
The beauty coming and the beauty gone.”

A few poets, in the exquisite adaptation of their words to the tune of our own feelings and fancies, in the charm of their manner, indefinable as the sympathetic grace of woman, *are* everything to us without our being able to say that they are much in themselves. They rather narcotize than fortify. Wordsworth must subject our mood to his own before he admits us to his intimacy; but, once admitted, it is for life, and we find ourselves in his debt, not for what he has been to us in our hours of relaxation, but for what he has done for us as a reinforcement of faltering purpose and personal independence of character. His system of a Nature-cure, first professed by Dr. Jean Jacques and continued by Cowper, certainly breaks down as a whole. The Solitary of “The Excursion,” who has not been cured of his scepticism by living among the medicinal mountains, is, so far as we can see, equally proof against the lectures of Pedler and Parson. Wordsworth apparently felt that this would be so, and accordingly never saw his way clear to finishing the poem. But the treatment, whether a panacea or not, is certainly whole-

some, inasmuch as it inculcates abstinence, exercise, and uncontaminate air. I am not sure, indeed, that the Nature-cure theory does not tend to foster in constitutions less vigorous than Wordsworth's what Milton would call a fugitive and cloistered virtue at a dear expense of manlier qualities. The ancients and our own Elizabethans, ere spiritual megrims had become fashionable, perhaps made more out of life by taking a frank delight in its action and passion and by grappling with the facts of this world, rather than muddling themselves over the insoluble problems of another. If they had not discovered the picturesque, as we understand it, they found surprisingly fine scenery in man and his destiny, and would have seen something ludicrous, it may be suspected, in the spectacle of a grown man running to hide his head in the apron of the Mighty Mother whenever he had an ache in his finger or got a bruise in the tussle for existence.

But when, as I have said, our impartiality has made all those qualifications and deductions against which even the greatest poet may not plead his privilege, what is left to Wordsworth is enough to justify his fame. Even where his genius is wrapped in clouds, the unconquerable lightning of imagination struggles through, flashing out unexpected vistas, and illuminating the humdrum pathway of our daily thought with a

radiance of momentary consciousness that seems like a revelation. If it be the most delightful function of the poet to set our lives to music, yet perhaps he will be even more sure of our maturer gratitude if he do his part also as moralist and philosopher to purify and enlighten; if he define and encourage our vacillating perceptions of duty; if he piece together our fragmentary apprehensions of our own life and that larger life whose unconscious instruments we are, making of the jumbled bits of our dissected map of experience a coherent chart. In the great poets there is an exquisite sensibility both of soul and sense that sympathizes like gossamer sea-moss with every movement of the element in which it floats, but which is rooted on the solid rock of our common sympathies. Wordsworth shows less of this finer feminine fibre of organization than one or two of his contemporaries, notably than Coleridge or Shelley; but he was a masculine thinker, and in his more characteristic poems there is always a kernel of firm conclusion from far-reaching principles that stimulates thought and challenges meditation. Groping in the dark passages of life, we come upon some axiom of his, as it were a wall that gives us our bearings and enables us to find an outlet. Compared with Goethe we feel that he lacks that serene impartiality of mind which results from breadth of culture; nay, he seems

narrow, insular, almost provincial. He reminds us of those saints of Dante who gather brightness by revolving on their own axis. But through this very limitation of range he gains perhaps in intensity and the impressiveness which results from eagerness of personal conviction. If we read Wordsworth through, as I have just done, we find ourselves changing our mind about him at every other page, so uneven is he. If we read our favorite poems or passages only, he will seem uniformly great. And even as regards "The Excursion" we should remember how few long poems will bear consecutive reading. For my part I know of but one, — the "Odyssey."

None of our great poets can be called popular in any exact sense of the word, for the highest poetry deals with thoughts and emotions which inhabit, like rarest sea-mosses, the doubtful limits of that shore between our abiding divine and our fluctuating human nature, rooted in the one, but living in the other, seldom laid bare, and otherwise visible only at exceptional moments of entire calm and clearness. Of no other poet except Shakespeare have so many phrases become household words as of Wordsworth. If Pope has made current more epigrams of worldly wisdom, to Wordsworth belongs the nobler praise of having defined for us, and given us for a daily possession, those faint and vague suggestions of other-worldliness of whose gentle

ministry with our baser nature the hurry and bustle of life scarcely ever allowed us to be conscious. He has won for himself a secure immortality by a depth of intuition which makes only the best minds at their best hours worthy, or indeed capable, of his companionship, and by a homely sincerity of human sympathy which reaches the humblest heart. Our language owes him gratitude for the habitual purity and abstinence of his style, and we who speak it, for having emboldened us to take delight in simple things, and to trust ourselves to our own instincts. And he hath his reward. It needs not to bid

“ Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lie
A little nearer Spenser ”; —

for there is no fear of crowding in that little society with whom he is now enrolled as fifth in the succession of the great English Poets.

MILTON



MILTON¹

1872

IF the biographies of literary men are to assume the bulk which Mr. Masson is giving to that of Milton, their authors should send a phial of *elixir vitae* with the first volume, that a purchaser might have some valid assurance of surviving to see the last. Mr. Masson has already occupied thirteen hundred and seventy-eight pages in getting Milton to his thirty-fifth year, and an interval of eleven years stretches between the dates of the first and second instalments of his published labors. As Milton's literary life properly begins at twenty-one, with the "Ode on the Nativity,"

¹ *The Life of John Milton*: narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time. By David Masson, M. A., LL. D., Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh. Vols. i., ii. 1638-1643. London and New York: Macmillan & Co. 1871. 8vo. pp. xii, 608.

The Poetical Works of John Milton, edited, with Introduction, Notes, and an Essay on Milton's English, by David Masson, M. A., LL. D., Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh. 3 vols. 8vo. Macmillan & Co. 1874.

and as by far the more important part of it lies between the year at which we are arrived and his death at the age of sixty-six, we might seem to have the terms given us by which to make a rough reckoning of how soon we are likely to see land. But when we recollect the baffling character of the winds and currents we have already encountered, and the eddies that may at any time slip us back to the reformation in Scotland or the settlement of New England; when we consider, moreover, that Milton's life overlapped the *grand siècle* of French literature, with its irresistible temptations to digression and homily for a man of Mr. Masson's temperament, we may be pardoned if a sigh of doubt and discouragement escape us. We envy the secular pleasures of Methuselah, and are thankful that *his* biography at least (if written in the same longeval proportion) is irrecoverably lost to us. What a subject would that have been for a person of Mr. Masson's spacious predilections! Even if he himself can count on patriarchal prerogations of existence, let him hang a print of the Countess of Desmond in his study to remind him of the ambushes which Fate lays for the toughest of us. For myself, I have not dared to climb a cherry-tree since I began to read his work. Even with the promise of a speedy third volume before me, I feel by no means sure of living to see Mary Powell back in

John Milton

1. The first step is to identify the problem.
 2. The second step is to define the problem.
 3. The third step is to analyze the problem.
 4. The fourth step is to develop a solution.
 5. The fifth step is to implement the solution.
 6. The sixth step is to evaluate the solution.
 7. The seventh step is to monitor the solution.
 8. The eighth step is to maintain the solution.
 9. The ninth step is to improve the solution.
 10. The tenth step is to document the solution.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

her husband's house; for it is just at this crisis that Mr. Masson, with the diabolical art of a practised serial writer, leaves us while he goes into an exhaustive account of the Westminster Assembly and the political and religious notions of the Massachusetts Puritans. One could not help thinking, after having got Milton fairly through college, that he was never more mistaken in his life than when he wrote

“How *soon* hath Time, that subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!”

Or is it Mr. Masson who has scotched Time's wheels?

It is plain from the Preface to the second volume that Mr. Masson himself has an uneasy consciousness that something is wrong, and that Milton ought somehow to be more than a mere incident of his own biography. He tells us that, “whatever may be thought by a hasty person looking in on the subject from the outside, no one can study the life of Milton as it ought to be studied without being obliged to study extensively and intimately the contemporary history of England, and even incidentally of Scotland and Ireland too. . . . Thus on the very compulsion, or at least the suasion, of the biography, a history grew on my hands. It was not in human nature to confine the historical inquiries, once they were in progress, within the precise limits of their demonstrable bearing on

the biography, even had it been possible to determine these limits beforehand; and so the history assumed a coördinate importance with me, was pursued often for its own sake, and became, though always with a sense of organic relation to the biography, continuous in itself." If a "hasty person" be one who thinks eleven years rather long to have his button held by a biographer ere he begin his next sentence, I take to myself the sting of Mr. Masson's covert sarcasm. I confess with shame a pusillanimity that is apt to flag if a "to be continued" do not redeem its promise before the lapse of a quinquennium. I could scarce await the "Autocrat" himself so long. The heroic age of literature is past, and even a duodecimo may often prove too heavy (*οἷοι νῦν βροτοί*) for the descendants of men to whom the folio was a pastime. But what does Mr. Masson mean by "continuous"? To me it seems rather as if his somewhat rambling history of the seventeenth century were interrupted now and then by an unexpected apparition of Milton, who, like Paul Pry, just pops in and hopes he does not intrude, to tell us what *he* has been doing in the mean-while. The reader, immersed in Scottish politics or the schemes of Archbishop Laud, is a little puzzled at first, but reconciles himself on being reminded that this fair-haired young man is the protagonist of the drama. *Pars minima est ipsa puella sui.*

If Goethe was right in saying that every man was a citizen of his age as well as of his country, there can be no doubt that in order to understand the motives and conduct of the man we must first make ourselves intimate with the time in which he lived. We have therefore no fault to find with the thoroughness of Mr. Masson's "historical inquiries." The more thorough the better, so far as they were essential to the satisfactory performance of his task. But it is only such contemporary events, opinions, or persons as were really operative on the character of the man we are studying that are of consequence, and we are to familiarize ourselves with them, not so much for the sake of explaining as of understanding him. The biographer, especially of a literary man, need only mark the main currents of tendency, without being officious to trace out to its marshy source every runlet that has cast in its tiny pitcherful with the rest. Much less should he attempt an analysis of the stream and to classify every component by itself, as if each were ever effectual singly and not in combination. Human motives cannot be thus chemically cross-examined, nor do we arrive at any true knowledge of character by such minute subdivision of its ingredients. Nothing is so essential to a biographer as an eye that can distinguish at a glance between real events that are the levers of thought and action, and what

Donne calls "unconcerning things, matters of fact,"—between substantial personages, whose contact or even neighborhood is influential, and the supernumeraries that serve first to fill up a stage and afterwards the interstices of a biographical dictionary.

"Time hath a wallet at his back
Wherein he puts alms for Oblivion."

Let the biographer keep his fingers off that sacred and merciful deposit, and not renew for us the bores of a former generation as if we had not enough of our own. But if he cannot forbear that unwise inquisitiveness, we may fairly complain when he insists on taking us along with him in the processes of his investigation, instead of giving us the sifted results in their bearing on the life and character of his subject, whether for help or hindrance. We are blinded with the dust of old papers ransacked by Mr. Masson to find out that they have no relation whatever to his hero. He had been wise if he had kept constantly in view what Milton himself says of those who gathered up personal traditions concerning the Apostles: "With less fervency was studied what St. Paul or St. John had written than was listened to one that could say 'Here he taught, here he stood, this was his stature, and thus he went habited; and O, happy this house that harbored him, and that cold stone whereon he rested, this village where

he wrought such a miracle.' . . . Thus while all their thoughts were poured out upon circumstances and the gazing after such men as had sat at table with the Apostles, . . . by this means they lost their time and truanted on the fundamental grounds of saving knowledge, as was seen shortly in their writings." Mr. Masson has so *poured out his mind upon circumstances*, that his work reminds us of Allston's picture of Elijah in the Wilderness, where a good deal of research at last enables us to guess at the prophet absconded like a conundrum in the landscape where the very ravens could scarce have found him out, except by divine commission. The figure of Milton becomes but a speck on the enormous canvas crowded with the scenery through which he may by any possibility be conjectured to have passed. I will cite a single example of the desperate straits to which Mr. Masson is reduced in order to hitch Milton on to his own biography. He devotes the first chapter of his Second Book to the meeting of the Long Parliament. "Already," he tells us, "in the earlier part of the day, the Commons had gone through the ceremony of hearing the writ for the Parliament read, and the names of the members that had been returned called over by Thomas Wylls, Esq., the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. His deputy, *Agar, Milton's brother-in-law, may have been in attendance*

on such an occasion. During the preceding month or two, *at all events*, Agar and his subordinates in the Crown Office had been unusually busy with the issue of the writs and with the other work connected with the opening of Parliament." (Vol. ii. p. 150.) Mr. Masson's resolute "at all events" is very amusing. Meanwhile

"The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

Augustine Thierry has a great deal to answer for, if to him we owe the modern fashion of writing history picturesquely. At least his method leads to most unhappy results when essayed by men to whom Nature has denied a sense of what the picturesque really is. The historical picturesque does not consist in truth of costume and similar accessories, but in the grouping, attitude, and expression of the figures, caught when they are unconscious that the artist is sketching them. The moment they are posed for a composition, unless by a man of genius, the life has gone out of them. In the hands of an inferior artist, who fancies that imagination is something to be squeezed out of color-tubes, the past becomes a phantasmagoria of jack-boots, doublets, and flap-hats, the mere property-room of a deserted theatre, as if the light had been scenical and illusory, the world an unreal thing that vanished with the foot-lights. It is the power of catching the actors in great

events at unawares that makes the glimpses given us by contemporaries so vivid and precious. And Saint-Simon, one of the great masters of the picturesque, lets us into the secret of his art when he tells us how, in that wonderful scene of the death of Monseigneur, he saw "*du premier coup d'œil vivement porté, tout ce qui leur échappoit et tout ce qui les accableroit.*" It is the gift of producing this reality that almost makes us blush, as if we had been caught peeping through a keyhole, and had surprised secrets to which we had no right, — it is this only that can justify the pictorial method of narration. Mr. Carlyle has this power of contemporizing himself with bygone times, he cheats us to

"Play with our fancies and believe we see"; —

but we find the *tableaux vivants* of the apprentices who "deal in his command without his power," and who compel us to work very hard indeed with our fancies, rather wearisome. The effort of weaker arms to shoot with his mighty bow has filled the air of recent literature with more than enough fruitless twanging.

Mr. Masson's style, at best cumbrous, becomes intolerably awkward when he strives to make up for the want of Saint-Simon's *premier coup d'œil* by impertinent details of what we must call the pseudo-dramatic kind. For example, does Hall profess to have traced Milton

from the University to a "suburb sink" of London? Mr. Masson fancies he hears Milton saying to himself, "A suburb sink! has Hall or his son taken the trouble to walk all the way down to Aldersgate here, to peep up the entry where I live, and so have an exact notion of my whereabouts? There has been plague in the neighborhood certainly; and I hope Jane Yates had my doorstep tidy for the visit." Does Milton, answering Hall's innuendo that he was courting the graces of a rich widow, tell us that he would rather "choose a virgin of mean fortunes honestly bred"? Mr. Masson forthwith breaks forth in a paroxysm of what we suppose to be picturesqueness in this wise: "What have we here? Surely nothing less, if we choose so to construe it, than a marriage advertisement! Ho, all ye virgins of England (widows need not apply), here is an opportunity such as seldom occurs: a bachelor, unattached; age, thirty-three years and three or four months; height [Milton, by the way, would have said *highth*] middle or a little less; personal appearance unusually handsome, with fair complexion and light auburn hair; circumstances independent; tastes intellectual and decidedly musical; principles Root-and-Branch! Was there already any young maiden in whose bosom, had such an advertisement come in her way, it would have raised a conscious flutter? If so, did she live

near Oxford?" If there *is* anything worse than an unimaginative man trying to write imaginatively, it is a heavy man when he fancies he is being facetious. He tramples out the last spark of cheerfulness with the broad damp foot of a hippopotamus.

I am no advocate of what is called the dignity of history, when it means, as it too often does, that dulness has a right of sanctuary in gravity. Too well do I recall the sorrows of my youth, when I was shipped in search of knowledge on the long Johnsonian swell of the last century, favorable to anything but the calm digestion of historic truth. I had even then an uneasy suspicion, which has ripened into certainty, that thoughts were never draped in long skirts like babies, if they were strong enough to go alone. But surely there should be such a thing as good taste, above all a sense of self-respect, in the historian himself, that should not allow him to play any tricks with the dignity of his subject. A halo of sacredness has hitherto invested the figure of Milton, and our image of him has dwelt securely in ideal remoteness from the vulgarities of life. No diaries, no private letters, remain to give the idle curiosity of after-times the right to force itself on the hallowed seclusion of his reserve. That a man whose familiar epistles were written in the language of Cicero, whose sense of personal dignity was so great

that, when called on in self-defence to speak of himself, he always does it with an epical stateliness of phrase, and whose self-respect even in youth was so profound that it resembles the reverence paid by other men to a far-off and idealized character, — that he should be treated in this off-hand familiar fashion by his biographer seems to us a kind of desecration, a violation of good manners no less than of the laws of biographic art. Milton is the last man in the world to be slapped on the back with impunity. Better the surly injustice of Johnson than such presumptuous friendship as this. Let the seventeenth century, at least, be kept sacred from the insupportable foot of the interviewer!

But Mr. Masson, in his desire to be (shall I say) idiomatic, can do something worse than what has been hitherto quoted. He can be even vulgar. Discussing the motives of Milton's first marriage, he says, "Did he come seeking his £500, and did Mrs. Powell *heave a daughter at him?*" We have heard of a woman throwing herself at a man's head, and the image is a somewhat violent one; but what is this to Mr. Masson's improvement on it? It has been sometimes affirmed that the fitness of an image may be tested by trying whether a picture could be made of it or not. Mr. Masson has certainly offered a new and striking subject to the historical school of British art. A little further on,

speaking of Mary Powell, he says, "We have no portrait of her, nor any account of her appearance; but on the usual rule of the elective affinities of opposites, Milton being fair, *we will vote her* to have been dark-haired." I need say nothing of the good taste of this sentence, but its absurdity is heightened by the fact that Mr. Masson himself had left us in doubt whether the match was one of convenience or inclination. I know not how it may be with other readers, but for myself I feel inclined to resent this hail-fellow-well-met manner with its jaunty "*we will vote.*" In some cases, Mr. Masson's indecorums in respect of style may possibly be accounted for as attempts at humor by one who has an imperfect notion of its ingredients. In such experiments, to judge by the effect, the pensive element of the compound enters in too large an excess over the hilarious. Whether I have hit upon the true explanation, or whether the cause lie not rather in a besetting velleity of the picturesque and vivid, I shall leave the reader to judge by an example or two. In the manuscript copy of Milton's sonnet in which he claims for his own house the immunity which the memory of Pindar and Euripides secured for other walls, the title had originally been, "*On his Door when the City expected an Assault.*" Milton has drawn a line through this and substituted "*When the Assault was intended to the*

City." Mr. Masson fancies "a mood of jest or semi-jest in the whole affair"; but we think rather that Milton's quiet assumption of equality with two such famous poets was as seriously characteristic as Dante's ranking himself *sesto tra cotanto senno*. Mr. Masson takes advantage of the obliterated title to imagine one of Prince Rupert's troopers entering the poet's study and finding some of his "Anti-Episcopal pamphlets that had been left lying about inadvertently. 'Oho!' the Cavalier Captain might then have said, 'Pindar and Euripides are all very well, by G—! I've been at college myself; and when I meet a gentleman and scholar, I hope I know how to treat him; but neither Pindar nor Euripides ever wrote pamphlets against the Church of England, by G—! It won't do, Mr. Milton!'" This, it may be supposed, is Mr. Masson's way of being funny and dramatic at the same time. Good taste is shocked with this barbarous dissonance. Could not the Muse defend her son? Again, when Charles I., at Edinburgh, in the autumn and winter of 1641, fills the vacant English sees, we are told, "It was more than an insult; it was a sarcasm! It was as if the King, while giving Alexander Henderson his hand to kiss, had winked his royal eye over that reverend Presbyterian's back!" Now one can conceive Charles II. winking when he took the Solemn League and Covenant, but

never his father under any circumstances. He may have been, and I believe he was, a bad king, but surely we may take Marvell's word for it, that

“He nothing common did or mean”

upon any of the “memorable scenes” of his life. The image is therefore out of all imaginative keeping, and vulgarizes the chief personage in a grand historical tragedy, who, if not a great, was at least a decorous actor. But Mr. Masson can do worse than this. Speaking of a Mrs. Katherine Chidley, who wrote in defence of the Independents against Thomas Edwards, he says, “People wondered who this she-Brownist, Katherine Chidley, was, and did not quite lose their interest in her when they found that she was an oldish woman, and a member of some hole-and-corner congregation in London. Indeed, *she put her nails into Mr. Edwards with some effect.*” Why did he not say at once, after the good old fashion, that she “set her ten commandments in his face”? In another place he speaks of “Satan standing with his *staff* around him.” Mr. Masson's style, a little Robertsonian at best, naturally grows worse when forced to condescend to every-day matters. He can no more dismount and walk than the man in armor on a Lord Mayor's day. “It [Aldersgate Street] stretches away northwards a full fourth of a mile

as one continuous thoroughfare, until, crossed by Long Lane and the Barbican, it parts with the name of Aldersgate Street, and, under the new names of Goswell Street and Goswell Road, *completes its tendency towards the suburbs* and fields about Islington." What a noble work might not the Directory be if composed on this scale! The imagination even of an alderman might well be lost in that full quarter of a mile of continuous thoroughfare. Mr. Masson is very great in these passages of civic grandeur; but he is more surprising, on the whole, where he has an image to deal with. Speaking of Milton's "two-handed engine" in "Lycidas," he says: "May not Milton, whatever else he meant, have meant a coming English Parliament with its two Houses? Whatever he meant, his prophecy had come true. As he sat among his books in Aldersgate Street, the two-handed engine at the door of the English Church was on the swing. Once, twice, thrice, it had swept its arcs to gather energy; now it was on the backmost poise, and the blow was to descend." One cannot help wishing that Mr. Masson would try his hand on the tenth horn of the beast in Revelation, or on the time and half a time of Daniel. There is something so consoling to a prophet in being told that, no matter what he meant, his prophecy had come true, and that he might mean "whatever else" he

pleased, so long as he *may* have meant what we choose to think he did, reasoning backward from the assumed fulfilment! But perhaps there may be detected in Mr. Masson's "swept its arcs" a little of that prophetic hedging-in vagueness to which he allows so generous a latitude. How if the "two-handed engine," after all, were a broom (or besom, to be more dignified), —

"Sweeping — vehemently sweeping,
No pause admitted, no design avowed," —

like that wielded by the awful shape which Dion the Syracusan saw? I make the suggestion modestly, though somewhat encouraged by Mr. Masson's system of exegesis, which reminds one of the casuists' doctrine of probables, in virtue of which a man may be *probabiliter obligatus* and *probabiliter deobligatus* at the same time. But perhaps the most remarkable instance of Mr. Masson's figures of speech is where we are told that the king might have established a *bona fide* government "by giving public ascendancy to the popular or Parliamentary element in his Council, and inducing the old leaven in it either to accept the new policy, or to withdraw and become inactive." There is something consoling in the thought that yeast should be accessible to moral suasion. It is really too bad that bread should ever be heavy for want of such an appeal to its moral sense as should "induce it to accept the new policy." Of Mr. Masson's unhappy infection

with the *vivid* style an instance or two shall be given in justification of what has been alleged against him in that particular. He says of London that "he was committed to the Tower, where for more than two months he lay, with as near a prospect as ever prisoner had of a *chop* with the executioner's axe on a scaffold on Tower Hill." I may be over-fastidious, but the word "*chop*" offends my ears with its coarseness, or if that be too strong, has certainly the unpleasant effect of an emphasis unduly placed. Old Auchinleck's saying of Cromwell, that "he gart kings ken they had a lith in their necks," is a good example of really vivid phrase, suggesting the axe and the block, and giving one of those dreadful hints to the imagination which are more powerful than any amount of detail, and whose skilful use is the only magic employed by the masters of truly picturesque writing. The sentence just quoted will serve also as an example of that tendency to *surplusage* which adds to the bulk of Mr. Masson's sentences at the cost of their effectiveness. If he had said simply "*chop* on Tower Hill" (if *chop* there must be), it had been quite enough, for we all know that the executioner's axe and the scaffold are implied in it. Once more, and I have done with the least agreeable part of my business. Mr. Masson, after telling over again the story of Strafford with needless length of detail, ends

thus: "On Wednesday, the 12th of May, that proud *curly* head, the casket of that brain of power, rolled on the scaffold of Tower Hill." Why *curly*? Surely it is here a ludicrous impertinence. This careful thrusting forward of outward and unmeaning particulars, in the hope of giving that reality to a picture which genius only has the art to do, is becoming a weariness in modern descriptive writing. It reminds one of the Mrs. Jarley expedient of dressing the waxen effigies of murderers in the very clothes they wore when they did the deed, or with the real halter round their necks wherewith they expiated it. It is probably very effective with the torpid sensibilities of the class who look upon wax figures as works of art. True imaginative power works with other material. Lady Macbeth striving to wash away from her hands the damned spot that is all the more there to the mind of the spectator because it is not there at all, is a type of the methods it employs and the intensity of their action.

Having discharged my duty in regard to Mr. Masson's faults of manner, which I should not have dwelt on so long had they not greatly marred a real enjoyment in the reading, and were they not the ear-mark of a school which has become unhappily numerous, I turn to a consideration of his work as a whole. I think he made a mistake in his very plan, or else was

guilty of a misnomer in his title. His book is not so much a life of Milton as a collection of materials out of which a careful reader may sift the main facts of the poet's biography. His passion for minute detail is only to be equalled by his diffuseness on points mainly if not altogether irrelevant. He gives us a Survey of British Literature, occupying one hundred and twenty-eight pages of his first volume, written in the main with good judgment, and giving the average critical opinion upon nearly every writer, great and small, who was in any sense a contemporary of Milton. I have no doubt all this would be serviceable and interesting to Mr. Masson's classes in Edinburgh University, and they may well be congratulated on having so competent a teacher; but what it has to do with Milton, unless in the case of such authors as may be shown to have influenced his style or turn of thought, one does not clearly see. Most readers of a life of Milton may be presumed to have some knowledge of the general literary history of the time, or at any rate to have the means of acquiring it, and Milton's manner (his style was his own) was very little affected by any of the English poets, with the single exception, in his earlier poems, of George Wither. Mr. Masson also has something to say about everybody, from Wentworth to the obscurest Brownist fanatic who was so much as heard of in England

during Milton's lifetime. If this theory of a biographer's duty should hold, our grandchildren may expect to see "A Life of Thackeray, or who was who in England, France, and Germany during the first Half of the Nineteenth Century." These digressions of Mr. Masson's from what should have been his main topic (he always seems somehow to be "completing his tendency towards the suburbs" of his subject) give him an uneasy feeling that he must get Milton in somehow or other at intervals, if it were only to remind the reader that he has a certain connection with the book. He is eager even to discuss a mere hypothesis, though an untenable one, if it will only increase the number of pages devoted specially to Milton, and thus lessen the apparent disproportion between the historical and the biographical matter. Milton tells us that his morning wont had been "to read good authors, or cause them to be read, till the attention be weary, or memory have his full fraught; then with useful and generous labors preserving the body's health and hardiness, to render lightsome, clear, and not lumpish obedience to the mind, to the cause of religion and our country's liberty when it shall require firm hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations rather than see the ruin of our Protestantism and the enforcement of a slavish life." Mr. Masson snatches at the hint: "This is in-

teresting," he says; "Milton, it seems, has for some time been practising drill! The City Artillery Ground was near. . . . Did Milton among others make a habit of going there of mornings? (Of this more hereafter." When Mr. Masson returns to the subject he speaks of Milton's "all but positive statement . . . that in the spring of 1642, or a few months before the breaking out of the Civil War, he was in the habit of spending a part of each day *in military exercise somewhere not far from his house in Aldersgate Street.*" What he puts by way of query on page 402 has become downright certainty seventy-nine pages further on. The passage from Milton's tract makes no "statement" of the kind it pleases Mr. Masson to assume. It is merely a Miltonian way of saying that he took regular exercise, because he believed that moral no less than physical courage demanded a sound body. And what proof does Mr. Masson bring to confirm his theory? Nothing more nor less than two or three passages in "Paradise Lost," of which I shall quote only so much as is essential to his argument: —

"And now

Advanced in view they stand, a horrid front
Of dreadful length and dazzling arms, in guise
Of warriors old with *ordered* spear and shield,
Awaiting what command their mighty chief
Had to impose." ¹

¹ Bk. 1. 562-567.

Mr. Masson assures us that "there are touches in this description (as, for example, the *ordering* of arms at the moment of halt, and without word of command) too exact and technical to have occurred to a mere civilian. Again, at the same review

" "He now prepared
To speak; whereat their doubled ranks they bend
From wing to wing, and half enclose him round
With all his peers; *attention* held them mute.'¹

To the present day this is the very process, or one of the processes, when a commander wishes to address his men. They wheel inward and stand at 'attention.'" But his main argument is the phrase "*ported* spears," in Book Fourth, on which he has an interesting and valuable comment. He argues the matter through a dozen pages or more, seeking to prove that Milton *must* have had some practical experience of military drill. I confess a very grave doubt whether "attention" and "ordered" in the passages cited have any other than their ordinary meaning, and Milton could never have looked on at the pike-exercise without learning what "ported" meant. But, be this as it may, I will venture to assert that there was not a boy in New England, forty years ago, who did not know more of the manual than is implied in Milton's use of these terms. Mr. Masson's

¹ Bk. I. 615-618.

object in proving Milton to have been a proficient in these martial exercises is to increase our wonder at his not entering the army. "If there was any man in England of whom one might surely have expected that he would be in arms among the Parliamentarians," he says, "that man was Milton." Milton may have had many an impulse to turn soldier, as all men must in such times, but I do not believe that he ever seriously intended it. Nor is it any matter of reproach that he did not. It is plain, from his works, that he believed himself very early set apart and consecrated for tasks of a very different kind, for services demanding as much self-sacrifice and of more enduring result. I have no manner of doubt that he, like Dante, believed himself divinely inspired with what he had to utter, and, if so, why not also divinely guided in what he should do or leave undone? Milton wielded in the cause he loved a weapon far more effective than a sword.

It is a necessary result of Mr. Masson's method that a great deal of space is devoted to what might have befallen his hero and what he might have seen. This leaves a broad margin indeed for the insertion of purely hypothetical incidents. Nay, so desperately addicted is he to what he deems the vivid style of writing, that he even goes out of his way to imagine what might have happened to anybody living at the

same time with Milton. Having told us fairly enough how Shakespeare, on his last visit to London, perhaps saw Milton "a fair child of six playing at his father's door," he must needs conjure up an imaginary supper at the Mermaid. "Ah! what an evening . . . was that; and how Ben and Shakespeare *be-tongued* each other, while the others listened and wondered; and how, when the company dispersed, the sleeping street heard their departing footsteps, and the stars shone down on the old roofs." Certainly, if we may believe the old song, the stars "had nothing else to do," though their chance of shining in the middle of a London November may perhaps be reckoned very doubtful. An author should consider how largely the art of writing consists in knowing what to leave in the inkstand.

Mr. Masson's volumes contain a great deal of very valuable matter, whatever one may think of its bearing upon the life of Milton. The chapters devoted to Scottish affairs are particularly interesting to a student of the Great Rebellion, its causes and concomitants. His analyses of the two armies, of the Parliament, and the Westminster Assembly, are sensible additions to our knowledge. A too painful thoroughness, indeed, is the criticism we should make on his work as a biography. Even as a history, the reader might complain that it confuses by the multiplicity of its details, while it

wearies by want of continuity. Mr. Masson lacks the skill of an accomplished story-teller. A fact is to him a fact, never mind how unessential, and he misses the breadth of truth in his devotion to accuracy. The very order of his title-page, "The Life of Milton, narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time," shows, it should seem, a misconception of the true nature of his subject. Milton's chief importance, it might be fairly said his only importance, is literary. His place is fixed as the most classical of our poets.

Neither in politics, theology, nor social ethics, did Milton leave any distinguishable trace on the thought of his time or in the history of opinion. In all these lines of his activity circumstances forced upon him the position of a controversialist whose aims and results are by the necessity of the case desultory and ephemeral. Hooker before him and Hobbes after him had a far firmer grasp of fundamental principles than he. His studies in these matters were perfunctory and occasional, and his opinions were heated to the temper of the times and shaped to the instant exigencies of the forum, sometimes to his own convenience at the moment, instead of being the slow result of a deliberate judgment enlightened by intellectual and above all historical sympathy with his subject. His interest was rather in the occasion

than the matter of the controversy. No aphorisms of political science are to be gleaned from his writings as from those of Burke. His intense personality could never so far dissociate itself from the question at issue as to see it in its larger scope and more universal relations. He was essentially a *doctrinaire*, ready to sacrifice everything to what at the moment seemed the abstract truth, and with no regard to historical antecedents and consequences, provided those of scholastic logic were carefully observed. He has no respect for usage or tradition except when they count in his favor, and sees no virtue in that power of the past over the minds and conduct of men which alone insures the continuity of national growth and is the great safeguard of order and progress. The life of a nation was of less importance to him than that it should be conformed to certain principles of belief and conduct. Burke could distil political wisdom out of history because he had a profound consciousness of the soul that underlies and outlives events, and of the national character that gives them meaning and coherence. Accordingly his words are still living and operative, while Milton's pamphlets are strictly occasional and no longer interesting except as they illustrate him. In the Latin ones especially there is an odd mixture of the pedagogue and the public orator. His training, so far as it was thorough, so far,

indeed, as it may be called optional, was purely poetical and artistic. A true Attic bee, he made boot on every lip where there was a trace of truly classic honey.

Milton, indeed, could hardly have been a match for some of his antagonists in theological and ecclesiastical learning. But he brought into the contest a white heat of personal conviction that counted for much. His self-consciousness, always active, identified him with the cause he undertook. "I conceived myself to be now not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker."¹ Accordingly it does not so much seem that he is the advocate of Puritanism, Freedom of Conscience, or the People of England, as that all these are *he*, and that he is speaking for himself. He was not nice in the choice of his missiles, and too often borrows a dirty lump from the dunghill of Luther; but now and then the gnarled sticks of controversy turn to golden arrows of Phœbus in his trembling hands, singing as they fly and carrying their messages of doom in music. Then, truly, in his prose as in his verse, his is the large utterance of the early gods, and there is that in him which tramples all learning under his victorious feet. From the first he looked upon himself as a man dedicated and

¹ *Apology for Smectymnus.*

set apart. He had that sublime persuasion of a divine mission which sometimes lifts his speech from personal to cosmopolitan significance; his genius unmistakably asserts itself from time to time, calling down fire from heaven to kindle the sacrifice of irksome private duty, and turning the hearthstone of an obscure man into an altar for the worship of mankind. Plainly enough here was a man who had received something other than Episcopal ordination. Mysterious and awful powers had laid their unimaginable hands on that fair head and devoted it to a nobler service. Yet it must be confessed that, with the single exception of the "Areopagitica," Milton's tracts are wearisome reading, and going through them is like a long sea-voyage whose monotony is more than compensated for the moment by a stripe of phosphorescence heaping before you in a drift of star-sown snow, coiling away behind in winking disks of silver, as if the conscious element were giving out all the moonlight it had garnered in its loyal depths since first it gazed upon its pallid regent. Which, being interpreted, means that his prose is of value because it is Milton's, because it sometimes exhibits in an inferior degree the qualities of his verse, and not for its power of thought, of reasoning, or of statement. It is valuable, where it is best, for its inspiring quality, like the fervencies of a Hebrew prophet. The English translation of

the Bible had to a very great degree Judaized, not the English mind, but the Puritan temper. Those fierce enthusiasts could more easily find elbow-room for their consciences in an ideal Israel than in a practical England. It was convenient to see Amalek or Philistia in the men who met them in the field, and one unintelligible horn or other of the Beast in their theological opponents. The spiritual provincialism of the Jewish race found something congenial in the English mind. Their national egotism quintessentialized in the prophets was especially sympathetic with the personal egotism of Milton. It was only as an inspired and irresponsible person that he could live on decent terms with his own self-confident individuality. There is an intolerant egotism which identifies itself with omnipotence,¹ and whose sublimity is its apology; there is an intolerable egotism which subordinates the sun to the watch in its own fob. Milton's was of the former kind, and accordingly the finest passages in his prose and not the least fine in his verse are autobiographic, and this is the more striking that they are often unconsciously so. Those fallen angels in utter ruin and combustion hurled, are also cavaliers fighting against the Good Old Cause; Philistia is

¹ "For him I was not sent, nor yet to free
That people, victor once, now vile and base,
Deservedly made vassal." (*P. R.*, iv. 131-133.)

the Restoration, and what Samson did, that Milton would have done if he could.

The "Areopagitica" might seem an exception, but that also is a plea rather than an argument, and his interest in the question is not one of abstract principle, but of personal relation to himself. He was far more rhetorician than thinker. The sonorous amplitude of his style was better fitted to persuade the feelings than to convince the reason. The only passages from his prose that may be said to have survived are emotional, not argumentative, or they have lived in virtue of their figurative beauty, not their weight of thought. Milton's power lay in dilation. Touched by him, the simplest image, the most obvious thought,

"Dilated stood
Like Teneriffe or Atlas . . .
. . . nor wanted in his grasp
What *seemed* both spear and shield."

But the thin stiletto of Macchiavelli is a more effective weapon than these fantastic arms of his. He had not the secret of compression that properly belongs to the political thinker, on whom, as Hazlitt said of himself, "nothing but abstract ideas makes any impression." Almost every aphoristic phrase that he has made current is borrowed from some one of the classics, like his famous

"License they mean when they cry liberty,"

from Tacitus. This is no reproach to him so far as his true function, that of poet, is concerned. It is his peculiar glory that literature was with him so much an art, an end and not a means. Of his political work he has himself told us, "I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein, knowing myself inferior to myself (led by the genial power of nature to another task), I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand."

Mr. Masson has given an excellent analysis of these writings, selecting with great judgment the salient passages, which have an air of blank verse thinly disguised as prose, like some of the corrupted passages of Shakespeare. We are particularly thankful to him for his extracts from the pamphlets written against Milton, especially for such as contain criticisms on his style. It is not a little interesting to see the most stately of poets reproached for his use of vulgarisms and low words. We seem to get a glimpse of the schooling of his "choiceful sense" to that nicety which could not be content till it had made his native tongue "search all her coffers round." One cannot help thinking also that his practice in prose, especially in the long involutions of Latin periods, helped him to give that variety of pause and that majestic harmony to his blank verse which have made it so unapproachably his own. Landor, who, like Milton, seems to have

thought in Latin, has caught somewhat more than others of the dignity of his gait, but without his length of stride. Wordsworth, at his finest, has perhaps approached it, but with how long an interval! Bryant has not seldom attained to its serene equanimity, but never emulates its pomp. Keats has caught something of its large utterance, but altogether fails of its nervous severity of phrase. Cowper's muse (that moved with such graceful ease in slippers) becomes stiff when (in his translation of Homer) she buckles on her feet the cothurnus of Milton. Thomson grows tumid wherever he assays the grandiosity of his model. It is instructive to get any glimpse of the slow processes by which Milton arrived at that classicism which sets him apart from, if not above, all our other poets.

In gathering up the impressions made upon us by Mr. Masson's work as a whole, we are inclined rather to regret his copiousness for his own sake than for ours. The several parts, though disproportionate, are valuable, his research has been conscientious, and he has given us better means of understanding Milton's time than we possessed before. But how is it about Milton himself? Here was a chance, it seems to me, for a fine bit of portrait-painting. There is hardly a more stately figure in literary history than Milton's, no life in some of its aspects

more tragical, except Dante's. In both these great poets, more than in any others, the character of the men makes part of the singular impressiveness of what they wrote and of its vitality with after-times. In them the man somehow overtops the author. The works of both are full of autobiographical confidences. Like Dante, Milton was forced to become a party by himself. He stands out in marked and solitary individuality, apart from the great movement of the Civil War, apart from the supine acquiescence of the Restoration, a self-opinionated, unforgiving, and unforgetting man. Very much alive he certainly was in his day. Has Mr. Masson made him alive to us again? I fear not. At the same time, while we cannot praise either the style or the method of Mr. Masson's work, we cannot refuse to be grateful for it. It is not so much a book for the ordinary reader of biography as for the student, and will be more likely to find its place on the library-shelf than on the centre-table. It does not in any sense belong to light literature, but demands all the muscle of the trained and vigorous reader. "Truly, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is Milton's life, it is naught."

Mr. Masson's intimacy with the facts and dates of Milton's career renders him peculiarly fit in some respects to undertake an edition of the poetical works. His edition, accordingly, has

distinguished merits. The introductions to the several poems are excellent and leave scarcely anything to be desired. The general Introduction, on the other hand, contains a great deal that might well have been omitted, and not a little that is positively erroneous. Mr. Masson's discussions of Milton's English seem often to be those of a Scotsman to whom English is in some sort a foreign tongue. It is almost wholly inconclusive, because confined to the Miltonic verse, while the basis of any altogether satisfactory study should surely be the Miltonic prose; nay, should include all the poetry and prose of his own age and of that immediately preceding it. The uses to which Mr. Masson has put the concordance to Milton's poems tempt one sometimes to class him with those whom the poet himself taxed with being "the mousehunts and ferrets of an index." For example, what profits a discussion of Milton's *ἅπαξ λεγόμενα*, a matter in which accident is far more influential than choice? ¹ What sensible addition is made to our stock of knowledge by learning that "the word *woman* does not occur in any form in Milton's poetry before 'Paradise Lost,'" and that it is "exactly so with the word *female*"? Is it any way remarkable that

¹ If things are to be scanned so micrologically, what weighty inferences might not be drawn from Mr. Masson's invariably printing *ἅπαξ λεγόμενα*!

such words as *Adam, God, Heaven, Hell, Paradise, Sin, Satan, and Serpent* should occur "very frequently" in "*Paradise Lost*"? Would it not rather have been surprising that they should not? Such trifles at best come under the head of what old Warner would have called cumberminds. It is time to protest against this minute style of editing and commenting great poets. Gulliver's microscopic eye saw on the fair skins of the Brobdignagian maids of honor "a mole here and there as broad as a trencher," and we shrink from a cup of the purest Hippocrene after the critic's solar microscope has betrayed to us the grammatical, syntactical, and, above all, hypothetical monsters that sprawl in every drop of it. When a poet has been so much edited as Milton, the temptation of whosoever undertakes a new edition to see what is not to be seen becomes great in proportion as he finds how little there is that has not been seen before.

Mr. Masson is quite right in choosing to modernize the spelling of Milton, for surely the reading of our classics should be made as little difficult as possible, and he is right also in making an exception of such abnormal forms as the poet may fairly be supposed to have chosen for melodic reasons. His exhaustive discussion of the spelling of the original editions seems, however, to be the less called for as he himself appears to admit that the compositor, not the

author, was supreme in these matters, and that in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases to the thousand Milton had no system, but spelt by immediate inspiration. Yet Mr. Masson fills nearly four pages with an analysis of the vowel sounds, in which, as if to demonstrate the futility of such attempts so long as men's ears differ, he tells us that the short *a* sound is the same in *man* and *Darby*, the short *o* sound in *God* and *does*, and what he calls the long *o* sound in *broad* and *wrath*. Speaking of the apostrophe, Mr. Masson tells us that "it is sometimes inserted, not as a possessive mark at all, but merely as a plural mark: *hero's* for *heroes*, *myrtle's* for *myrtles*, *Gorgon's* and *Hydra's*, etc." Now, in books printed about the time of Milton's the apostrophe was put in almost at random, and in all the cases cited is a misprint, except in the first, where it serves to indicate that the pronunciation was not *herôës* as it had formerly been.¹ In the "possessive singular of nouns already ending in *s*," Mr. Masson tells us, "Milton's general practice is not to double the *s*; thus, *Nereus wrinkled look*, *Glaucus spell*. The necessities of metre

¹ "That you may tell heroës, when you come
To banquet with your wife."

Chapman's *Odyssey*, viii. 336, 337.

In the facsimile of the sonnet to Fairfax I find

"Thy firm unshak'n vertue ever brings," —

which shows how much faith we need give to the apostrophe.

would naturally constrain to such forms. In a possessive followed by the word *sake* or the word *side*, dislike to [of] the double sibilant makes us sometimes drop the inflection. In addition to '*for righteousness' sake*,' such phrases as '*for thy name sake*' and '*for mercy sake*,' are allowed to pass; *bedside* is normal and *riverside* nearly so." The necessities of metre need not be taken into account with a poet like Milton, who never was fairly in his element till he got off the soundings of prose and felt the long swell of his verse under him like a steed that knows his rider. But does the dislike of the double sibilant account for the dropping of the *s* in these cases? Is it not far rather the presence of the *s* already in the sound satisfying an ear accustomed to the English slovenliness in the pronunciation of double consonants? It was this which led to such forms as *conscience sake* and *on justice side*, and which beguiled Ben Jonson and Dryden into thinking, the one that *noise* and the other that *corps* was a plural.¹ What does Mr. Masson say to *hillside*, *Bankside*, *seaside*, *Cheapside*, *spindleside*, *spearside*,

¹ Mr. Masson might have cited a good example of this from Drummond, whom (as a Scotsman) he is fond of quoting for an authority in English,—

"Sleep, Silence' child, sweet father of soft rest."

The survival of *horse* for *horses* is another example. So by a reverse process *pult* and *shay* have been vulgarly deduced from the supposed plurals *pulse* and *chaise*.

gospelside (of a church), *nightside*, *countryside*, *wayside*, *brookside*, and I know not how many more? Is the first half of these words a possessive? Or is it not rather a noun impressed into the service as an adjective? How do such words differ from *hilltop*, *townend*, *candlelight*, *rushlight*, *cityman*, and the like, where no double *s* can be made the scapegoat? Certainly Milton would not have avoided them for their sibilancy, he who wrote

“And airy tongues that syllable men’s names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses,”

“So in his seed all nations shall be blest,”

“And seat of Salmanasser whose success,” —

verses that hiss like Medusa’s head in wrath, and who was, I think, fonder of the sound than any other of our poets. Indeed, in compounds of the kind we always make a distinction wholly independent of the doubled *s*. Nobody would boggle at *mountainside*; no one would dream of saying *on the fatherside* or *motherside*.

Mr. Masson speaks of “the Miltonic forms *vanquisht*, *markt*, *lookt*, etc.” Surely he does not mean to imply that these are peculiar to Milton? Chapman used them before Milton was born, and pressed them farther, as in *nak’t* and *saf’t* for *naked* and *saved*. He often prefers the contracted form in his prose also, showing that the full form of the past participle in *ed* was passing

out of fashion, though available in verse.¹ Indeed, I venture to affirm that there is not a single variety of spelling or accent to be found in Milton which is without example in his predecessors or contemporaries. Even *highth*, which is thought peculiarly Miltonic, is common (in Hakluyt, for example), and still often heard in New England. Mr. Masson gives an odd reason for Milton's preference of it "as indicating more correctly the formation of the word by the addition of the suffix *th* to the adjective *high*." Is an adjective, then, at the base of *growth*, *earth*, *birth*, *truth*, and other words of this kind? Horne Tooke made a better guess than this. If Mr. Masson be right in supposing that a peculiar meaning is implied in the spelling *beareth* ("Paradise Lost," xi. 624), which he interprets as "collective produce," though in the only

¹ Chapman's spelling is presumably his own. At least he looked after his printed texts. I have two copies of his *Byron's Conspiracy*, both dated 1608, but one evidently printed later than the other, for it shows corrections. The more solemn ending in *ed* was probably kept alive by the reading of the Bible in churches. Though now dropped by the clergy, it is essential to the right hearing of the more metrical passages in the Old Testament, which are finer and more scientific than anything in the language, unless it be some parts of *Samson Agonistes*. I remember an old gentleman who always used the contracted form of the participle in conversation, but always gave it back its embezzled syllable in reading. Sir Thomas Browne seems to have preferred the more solemn form. At any rate he has the spelling *empuzzled* in prose.

other instance where it occurs it is neither more nor less than *birth*, it should seem that Milton had hit upon Horne Tooke's etymology. But it is really solemn trifling to lay any stress on the spelling of the original editions, after having admitted, as Mr. Masson has honestly done, that in all likelihood Milton had nothing to do with it. And yet he cannot refrain. On the word *voutsafe* he hangs nearly a page of dissertation on the nicety of Milton's ear. Mr. Masson thinks that Milton "must have had a reason for it,"¹ and finds that reason in "his dislike to [of] the sound *ch*, or to [of] that sound combined with *s*. . . . His fine ear taught him not only to seek for musical effects and cadences at large, but also to be fastidious as to syllables, and to avoid harsh or difficult conjunctions of consonants, except when there might be a musical reason for harshness or difficulty. In the management of the letter *s*, the frequency of which in English is one of the faults of the speech, he will be found, I believe, most careful and skilful. More rarely, I think, than in

¹ He thinks the same of the variation *strook* and *struck*, though they were probably pronounced alike. In Marlowe's *Faustus* two consecutive sentences (in prose) begin with the words "Cursed be he that struck." In a note on the passage Mr. Dyce tells us that the old editions (there were three) have *stroke* and *strooke* in the first instance, and all agree on *strucke* in the second. No inference can be drawn from such casualties.

Shakespeare will one word ending in *s* be found followed immediately in Milton by another word beginning with the same letter; or if he does occasionally pen such a phrase as *Moab's sons*, it will be difficult to find in him, I believe, such a harsher example as *earth's substance*, of which many writers would think nothing. [With the index to back him Mr. Masson could safely say this.] The same delicacy of ear is even more apparent in his management of the *sh* sound. He has it often, of course; but it may be noted that he rejects it in his verse when he can. He writes *Basan* for *Bashan*, *Sittim* for *Shittim*, *Silo* for *Shiloh*, *Asdod* for *Ashdod*. Still more, however, does he seem to have been wary of the compound sound *ch* as in *church*. Of his sensitiveness to this sound in excess there is a curious proof in his prose pamphlet entitled 'An Apology against a Pamphlet, called A Modest Completion, etc.,' where, having occasion to quote these lines from one of the Satires¹ of his opponent, Bishop Hall, —

“ ‘Teach each hollow grove to sound his love,
Wearying echo with one changeless word,’ —

he adds, ironically, ‘And so he well might,

¹ The lines are *not* “from one of the Satires,” and Milton made them worse by misquoting and bringing *love* jinglingly near to *grove*. Hall's verse (in his Satires) is always vigorous and often harmonious. He long before Milton spoke of rhyme almost in the very terms of the Preface to *Paradise Lost*.

and all his auditory besides, with his *teach each!*” Generalizations are always risky, but when extemporized from a single hint they are maliciously so. Surely it needed no great sensitiveness of ear to be set on edge by Hall’s echo of *teach each*. Did Milton reject the *h* from *Bashan* and the rest because he disliked the sound of *sh*, or because he had found it already rejected by the Vulgate and by some of the earlier translators of the Bible into English? Oddly enough, Milton uses words beginning with *sh* seven hundred and fifty-four times in his poetry, not to speak of others in which the sound occurs, as, for instance, those ending in *tion*. Hall, had he lived long enough, might have retorted on Milton his own

“Manliest, resoluest, breast,
As the magnetick hardest iron draws,” —

or his

“What moves thy inquisition?
Know’st thou not that my rising is thy fall,
And my promotion thy destruction?”

With the playful controversial wit of the day he would have hinted that too much *est-est* is as fatal to a blank verse as to a bishop, and that danger was often incurred by those who too eagerly *shunned* it. Nay, he might even have found an echo almost tallying with his own in

“To begirt the almighty throne
Beseeching or besieging,” —

a pun worthy of Milton's worst prose. Or he might have twitted him with "a *sequent* king who *seeks*." As for the *sh* sound, a poet could hardly have found it ungracious to his ear who wrote,

"Gnashing for anguish and despite and *shame*,"

or again,

"Then bursting forth

Afesh with conscious terrors vex me round

That rest or intermission none I find.

Before mine eyes in opposition sits

Grim Death, my son."

And if Milton disliked the *ch* sound, he gave his ears unnecessary pain by verses such as these, —

"Straight couches close; then, rising, *changes* oft

His couchant *watch*, as one who *chose* his ground";

still more by such a juxtaposition as "matchless chief."¹

¹ Mr. Masson goes so far as to conceive it possible that Milton may have committed the vulgarism of leaving a *t* out of *sleep'st*, "for ease of sound." Yet the poet could bear *boast'st* and — one stares and gasps at it — *doat'st*. There is, by the way, a familiar passage in which the *ch* sound predominates, not without a touch of *sh* in a single couplet: —

"Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould

Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?"

So

"Blotches and blains must all his flesh emboss;"

and perhaps

"I see his tents

Pitched about Sechem"

might be added.

The truth is, that Milton was a harmonist rather than a melodist. There are, no doubt, some exquisite melodies (like the "Sabrina Fair") among his earlier poems, as could hardly fail to be the case in an age which produced or trained the authors of our best English glees, as ravishing in their instinctive felicity as the songs of our dramatists, but he also showed from the first that larger style which was to be his peculiar distinction. The strain heard in the "Nativity Ode," in the "Solemn Music," and in "Lycidas," is of a higher mood, as regards metrical construction, than anything that had thrilled the English ear before, giving no uncertain augury of him who was to show what sonorous metal lay silent till he touched the keys in the epical organ-pipes of our various language, that have never since felt the strain of such prevailing breath. It was in the larger movements of metre that Milton was great and original. I have spoken elsewhere of Spenser's fondness for dilation as respects thoughts and images. In Milton it extends to the language also, and often to the single words of which a period is composed. He loved phrases of towering port, in which every member dilated stands like Teneriffe or Atlas. In those poems and passages that stamp him great, the verses do not dance interweaving to soft Lydian airs, but march rather with resounding tread and clang

of martial music. It is true that he is cunning in alliterations, so scattering them that they tell in his orchestra without being obvious, but it is in the more scientific region of open-voweled assonances which seem to proffer rhyme and yet withhold it (rhyme-wraiths one might call them), that he is an artist and a master. He even sometimes introduces rhyme with misleading intervals between and unobviously in his blank verse:—

“ There rest, if any rest can harbour *there* ;
And, reassembling our afflicted powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how *repair*,
How overcome this dire calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not, what resolution from *despair*.”¹

There is one almost perfect quatrain, —

“ Before thy fellows, ambitious to win
From me some plume, that thy success may show
Destruction to the rest. This pause between
(Unanswered lest thou boast) to let thee know ”; —

and another hardly less so, of a rhyme and an assonance, —

“ If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft
In worst extremes and on the perilous edge
Of battle when it raged, in all assaults.”

¹ I think Coleridge's nice ear would have blamed the nearness of *enemy* and *calamity* in this passage. Mr. Masson leaves out the comma after *If not*, the pause of which is needful, I think, to the sense, and certainly to keep *not* a little farther apart from *what*, (“teach each” !)

There can be little doubt that the rhymes in the first passage cited were intentional, and perhaps they were so in the others; but Milton's ear has tolerated not a few perfectly rhyming couplets, and others in which the assonance almost becomes rhyme, certainly a fault in blank verse: —

“ From the Asian Kings (and Parthian among these),
From India and the Golden Chersonese ”;

“ That soon refreshed him wearied, and repaired
What hunger, if aught hunger, had impaired ”;

“ And will alike be punished, whether thou
Reign or reign not, though to that gentle brow ”;

“ Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,
Save what is in destroying, other joy ”;

“ Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
Than this of Eden, and far happier days ”;

“ This my long sufferance and my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn shall never taste ”;

“ So far remote with diminution seen,
First in his East the glorious lamp was seen.”¹

These examples (and others might be adduced) serve to show that Milton's ear was too busy about the larger interests of his measures to be always careful of the lesser. He was a strategist rather than a drill-sergeant in verse, capable, beyond any other English poet, of putting great

¹ “ First in his East,” is not soothing to the ear.

masses through the most complicated evolutions without clash or confusion, but he was not curious that every foot should be at the same angle. In reading "Paradise Lost" one has a feeling of vastness. You float under an illimitable sky, brimmed with sunshine or hung with constellations; the abysses of space are about you; you hear the cadenced surges of an unseen ocean; thunders mutter round the horizon; and if the scene change, it is with an elemental movement like the shifting of mighty winds. His imagination seldom condenses, like Shakespeare's, in the kindling flash of a single epithet, but loves better to diffuse itself. Witness his descriptions, wherein he seems to circle like an eagle bathing in the blue streams of air, controlling with his eye broad sweeps of champaign or of sea, and rarely fulminating in the sudden swoop of intenser expression. He was fonder of the vague, perhaps I should rather say the indefinite, where more is meant than meets the ear, than any other of our poets. He loved epithets (like *old* and *far*) that suggest great reaches, whether of space or time. This bias shows itself already in his earlier poems, as where he hears

"The *far off* curfew sound
Over some *widewatered* shore,"

or where he fancies the shores¹ and sounding

¹ There seems to be something wrong in this word *shores*. Did Milton write *shoals*?

seas washing Lycidas far away ; but it reaches its climax in the "Paradise Lost." He produces his effects by dilating our imaginations with an impalpable hint rather than by concentrating them upon too precise particulars. Thus in a famous comparison of his, the fleet has no definite port, but plies stemming nightly toward the pole in a wide ocean of conjecture. He generalizes always instead of specifying, — the true secret of the ideal treatment in which he is without peer, and, though everywhere grandiose, he is never turgid. Tasso begins finely with

" Chiama gli abitator dell' ombre eterne
Il rauco suon della tartarea tromba;
Tremar le spaziose atre caverne,
E l' aer cieco a quel rumor rimbomba,"

but soon spoils all by condescending to definite comparisons with thunder and intestinal convulsions of the earth ; in other words, he is unwary enough to give us a standard of measurement, and the moment you furnish Imagination with a yardstick she abdicates in favor of her statistical poor-relation Commonplace. Milton, with this passage in his memory, is too wise to hamper himself with any statement for which he can be brought to book, but wraps himself in a mist of looming indefiniteness ; —

" He called so loud that all the hollow deep
Of hell resounded ; "

thus amplifying more nobly by abstention from

his usual method of prolonged evolution. No caverns, however spacious, will serve his turn, because they have limits. He could practise this self-denial when his artistic sense found it needful, whether for variety of verse or for the greater intensity of effect to be gained by abruptness. His more elaborate passages have the multitudinous roll of thunder, dying away to gather a sullen force again from its own reverberations, but he knew that the attention is recalled and arrested by those claps that stop short without echo and leave us listening. There are no such vistas and avenues of verse as his. In reading the "Paradise Lost" one has a feeling of spaciousness such as no other poet gives. Milton's respect for himself and for his own mind and its movements rises well-nigh to veneration. He prepares the way for his thought and spreads on the ground before the sacred feet of his verse tapestries inwoven with figures of mythology and romance. There is no such unfailing dignity as his. Observe at what a reverent distance he begins when he is about to speak of himself, as at the beginning of the Third Book and the Seventh. His sustained strength is especially felt in his beginnings. He seems always to start full-sail; the wind and tide always serve; there is never any fluttering of the canvas. In this he offers a striking contrast with Wordsworth, who has to go through with a great deal of *yo-heave*

ohing before he gets under way. And though, in the didactic parts of "Paradise Lost," the wind dies away sometimes, there is a long swell that will not let us forget it, and ever and anon some eminent verse lifts its long ridge above its tamer peers heaped with stormy memories. And the poem never becomes incoherent; we feel all through it, as in the symphonies of Beethoven, a great controlling reason in whose safe-conduct we trust implicitly.

Mr. Masson's discussions of Milton's English are, it seems to me, for the most part unsatisfactory. He occupies some ten pages, for example, with a history of the genitival form *its*, which adds nothing to our previous knowledge on the subject and which has no relation to Milton except for its bearing on the authorship of some verses attributed to him against the most overwhelming internal evidence to the contrary. Mr. Masson is altogether too resolute to find traces of what he calls oddly enough "recollectiveness of Latin constructions" in Milton, and scents them sometimes in what would seem to the uninstructed reader very idiomatic English. More than once, at least, he has fancied them by misunderstanding the passage in which they seem to occur. Thus, in "Paradise Lost," xi. 520, 521, —

"Therefore so abject is their punishment,
Disfiguring not God's likeness but their own," —

has no analogy with *eorum deformantium*, for the context shows that it is the *punishment* which disfigures. Indeed, Mr. Masson so often finds constructions difficult, ellipses strange, and words needing annotation that are common to all poetry, nay, sometimes to all English, that his notes seem not seldom to have been written by a foreigner. On this passage in "Comus," —

"I do not think my sister so to seek
Or so unprincipled in virtue's book
And the sweet peace that virtue bosoms ever
As that the single want of light and noise
(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,"

Mr. Masson tells us, that "in very strict construction, *not being* would cling to *want* as its substantive; but the phrase passes for the Latin ablative absolute." So on the words *forestalling night*, "i. e. anticipating. *Forestall* is literally to anticipate the market by purchasing goods before they are brought to the stall." In the verse

"Thou hast immanacled while Heaven sees good,"

he explains that "*while* here has the sense of *so long as*." But Mr. Masson's notes on the language are his weakest. He is careful to tell us, for example, "that there are instances of the use of *shine* as a substantive in Spenser, Ben Jonson, and other poets." It is but another way of spelling *sheen*, and if Mr. Masson never heard a shoeblack in the street say, "Shall I give you

a shine, sir?" his experience has been singular.¹ His notes in general are very good (though too long). Those on the astronomy of Milton are particularly valuable. I think he is sometimes a little too scornful of parallel passages,² for if there is one thing more striking than another in this poet, it is that his great and original imagination was almost wholly nourished by books, perhaps I should rather say set in motion by

¹ But his etymological notes are worse. For example, "*recreant*, renouncing the faith, from the old French *recroire*, which again is from the mediæval Latin *recredere*, to 'believe back,' or apostatize." This is pure fancy. The word had no such meaning in either language. He derives *serenate* from *sera*, and says that *parle* means treaty, negotiation, though it is the same word as *parley*, had the same meanings, and was commonly pronounced like it, as in Marlowe's

"What, shall we *parle* with this Christian?"

It certainly never meant *treaty*, though it may have meant *negotiation*. When it did, it implied the meeting face to face of the principals. On the verses

"And some flowers and some bays
For thy *hearse* to strew the ways,"

he has a note to tell us that *hearse* is not to be taken "in our sense of a carriage for the dead, but in the older sense of a tomb or framework over a tomb," though the obvious meaning is "to strew the ways for thy *hearse*." How could one do that for a tomb or the framework over it?

² A passage from Dante (*Inferno*, xi. 96-105), with its reference to Aristotle, would have given him the meaning of "Nature taught art," which seems to puzzle him. A study of Dante and of his earlier commentators would also have been of great service in the astronomical notes.

them. It is wonderful how, from the most withered and juiceless hint gathered in his reading, his grand images rise like an exhalation; how from the most battered old lamp caught in that huge drag-net with which he swept the waters of learning, he could conjure a tall genius to build his palaces. Whatever he touches swells and towers. That wonderful passage in "Comus" of the airy tongues, perhaps the most imaginative in suggestion he ever wrote, was conjured out of a dry sentence in Purchas's abstract of Marco Polo. Such examples help us to understand the poet. When I find that Sir Thomas Browne had said before Milton, that Adam "*was the wisest of all men since,*" I am glad to find this link between the most profound and the most stately imagination of that age. Such parallels sometimes give a hint also of the historical development of our poetry, of its apostolical succession, so to speak. Every one has noticed Milton's fondness of sonorous proper names, which have not only an acquired imaginative value by association, and so serve to awaken our poetic sensibilities, but have likewise a merely musical significance. This he probably caught from Marlowe, traces of whom are frequent in him. There is certainly something of what afterwards came to be called Miltonic in more than one passage of "Tamburlaine," a play in which gigantic force seems

struggling from the block, as in Michael Angelo's Dawn.

Mr. Masson's remarks on the versification of Milton are, in the main, judicious, but when he ventures on particulars, one cannot always agree with him. He seems to understand that our prosody is accentual merely, and yet, when he comes to what he calls *variations*, he talks of the "substitution of the Trochee, the Pyrrhic, or the Spondee, for the regular Iambus, or of the Anapæst, the Dactyl, the Tribrach, etc., for the same." This is always misleading. The shift of the accent in what Mr. Masson calls "disyllabic variations" is common to all pentameter verse, and, in the other case, most of the words cited as trisyllables either were not so in Milton's day,¹ or were so or not at choice of the poet, according to their place in the verse. There is not an elision of Milton's without precedent in the dramatists from whom he learned to write blank verse. Milton was a greater metrist than any of them, except Marlowe and Shakespeare, and he employed the elision (or the slur) oftener than they to give a faint undulation or retardation to his verse, only because his epic form demanded

¹ Almost every combination of two vowels might in those days be a diphthong or not, at will. Milton's practice of elision was confirmed and sometimes (perhaps) modified by his study of the Italians, with whose usage in this respect he closely conforms.

it more for variety's sake. How Milton would have *read* them, is another question. He certainly often marked them by an apostrophe in his manuscripts. He doubtless composed according to quantity, so far as that is possible in English, and as Cowper somewhat extravagantly says, "gives almost as many proofs of it in his 'Paradise Lost' as there are lines in the poem."¹ But when Mr. Masson tells us that

"Self-fed and self-consumed: if this fail,"

and

"Dwells in all Heaven charity so rare,"

are "only nine syllables," and that in

"Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream,"

"either the third foot must be read as an *anapest* or the word *hugest* must be pronounced as one syllable, *hug'st*," I think Milton would have invoked the soul of Sir John Cheek. Of course Milton read it

"Created hugest that swim th' ocean-stream," —

just as he wrote (if we may trust Mr. Masson's facsimile)

"Thus sang the uncouth swain to th' oaks and rills," —

a verse in which both hiatus and elision occur precisely as in the Italian poets.² "Gest that

¹ Letter to Rev. W. Bagot, 4th January, 1791.

² So Dante: —

"Ma sapienza e amore e virtute."

So Donne: —

"Simony and sodomy in churchmen's lives."

swim" would be rather a knotty *anapest*, an insupportable foot indeed! And why is even *hug'st* worse than Shakespeare's

"*Young'st* follower of thy drum"?

In the same way he says of

"For we have also our evening and our morn,"

that "the metre of this line is irregular," and of the rapidly fine

"Came flying and in mid air aloud thus cried,"

that it is "a line of unusual metre." Why more unusual than

"As being the contrary to his high will"?

What would Mr. Masson say to these three verses from Dekkar?—

"And *knowing* so much, I muse thou art so poor";

"I fan away the dust *flying* in mine eyes";

"*Flowing* o'er with court news only of you and them."

All such participles (where no consonant divided the vowels) were normally of one syllable, permissibly of two.¹ If Mr. Masson had studied the poets who preceded Milton as he

¹ Mr. Masson is evidently not very familiar at first hand with the versification to which Milton's youthful ear had been trained, but seems to have learned something from Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar* in the interval between writing his notes and his Introduction. Walker's *Shakespeare's Versification* would have been a great help to him in default of original knowledge.

has studied *him*, he would never have said that the verse —

“Not this rock only; his omnipresence fills” —

was “peculiar as having a distinct syllable of over-measure.” He retains Milton’s spelling of *hunderd* without perceiving the metrical reason for it, that *d*, *t*, *p*, *b*, etc., followed by *l* or *r*, might be either of two or of three syllables. In Marlowe we find it both ways in two consecutive verses: —

“A hundred [hunderēd] and fifty thousand horse,
Two hundred thousand foot, brave men at arms.”¹

Mr. Masson is especially puzzled by verses ending in one or more unaccented syllables, and even argues in his Introduction that some of them might be reckoned Alexandrines. He cites some lines of Spenser as confirming his theory, forgetting that rhyme wholly changes the conditions of the case by throwing the accent (appreciably even now, but more emphatically in Spenser’s day) on the last syllable.

“A spirit and judgment equal or superior,”

he calls “a remarkably anomalous line, consisting of twelve or even thirteen syllables.” Surely Milton’s ear would never have tolerated a dis-

¹ Milton has a verse in *Comus* where the *e* is elided from the word *sister* by its preceding a vowel: —

“Heaven keep my sister! again, again, and near!”

This would have been impossible before a consonant.

syllabic "spirit" in such a position. The word was then more commonly of one syllable, though it might be two, and was accordingly spelt *spreet* (still surviving in *sprite*), *sprit*, and even *spirt*, as Milton himself spells it in one of Mr. Masson's facsimiles.¹ Shakespeare, in the verse

"Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,"

uses the word admirably well in a position where it *cannot* have a metrical value of more than one syllable, while it gives a dancing movement to the verse in keeping with the sense. Our old metrists were careful of elasticity, a quality which modern verse has lost in proportion as our language has stiffened into uniformity under the benumbing fingers of pedants.

This discussion of the value of syllables is not so trifling as it seems. A great deal of nonsense has been written about imperfect measures in Shakespeare, and of the admirable dramatic effect produced by filling up the gaps of missing syllables with pauses or prolongations of the voice in reading. In rapid, abrupt, and passionate dialogue this is possible, but in passages of continuously level speech it is barbarously absurd. I do not believe that any of our old dramatists has knowingly left us a single imperfect verse. Seeing in what a haphazard way

¹ So *spirito* and *spirto* in Italian, *esperis* and *espirts* in Old French.

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and in how mutilated a form their plays have mostly reached us, we should attribute such *faults* (as a geologist would call them) to anything rather than to the deliberate design of the poets. Marlowe and Shakespeare, the two best metrists among them, have given us a standard by which to measure what licenses they took in versification, — the one in his translations, the other in his poems. The unmanageable verses in Milton are very few, and all of them occur in works printed after his blindness had lessened the chances of supervision and increased those of error. There are only two, indeed, which seem to me wholly indigestible as they stand. These are,

“Burnt after them to the bottomless pit,”

and

“With them from bliss to the bottomless deep.”

This certainly looks like a case where a word had dropped out or had been stricken out by some proof-reader who limited the number of syllables in a pentameter verse by that of his finger-ends. Mr. Masson notices only the first of these lines, and says that to make it regular by accenting the word *bottomless* on the second syllable would be “too horrible.” Certainly not, if Milton so accented it, any more than *blasphemous* and twenty more which sound oddly to us now. However that may be, Milton could not

have intended to close not only a period, but a paragraph also, with an unmusical verse, and in the only other passage where the word occurs it is accented as now on the first syllable: —

“ With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell.”

As *bottom* is a word which, like *bosom* and *besom*, may be monosyllabic or dissyllabic according to circumstances, I am persuaded that the last passage quoted (and all three refer to the same event) gives us the word wanting in the two others, and that Milton wrote, or meant to write,

“ Burnt after them down to the bottomless pit,”

which leaves in the verse precisely the kind of ripple that Milton liked best.¹

Much of what Mr. Masson says in his Introduction of the way in which the verses of Milton should be read is judicious enough, though some of the examples he gives, of the “comicality” which would ensue from compressing every verse into an exact measure of ten syllables, are based on a surprising ignorance of the

¹ Milton, however, would not have balked at *th' bottomless* any more than Drayton at *th' rejected* or Donne at *th' sea*. Mr. Masson does not seem to understand this elision, for he corrects *i' th' midst* to *i' the midst*, and takes pains to mention it in a note. He might better have restored the *n* in *i'*, where it is no contraction, but merely indicates the pronunciation, as *o'* for *of* and *on*.

laws which guided our poets just before and during Milton's time in the structure of their verses. Thus he seems to think that a strict scansion would require us in the verses

“So he with difficulty and labor hard,”

and

“Carnation, purple, azure, or specked with gold”

to pronounce *diffikty* and *purp'*. Though Mr. Masson talks of “slurs and elisions,” his ear would seem somewhat insensible to their exact nature or office. His *diffikty* supposes a hiatus where none is intended, and his making *purple* of one syllable wrecks the whole verse, the real slur in the latter case being on *azure or*.¹ When he asks whether Milton required “these pronunciations in his verse,” no positive answer can be given, but I very much doubt whether he would have thought that some of the lines Mr. Masson cites “remain perfectly good Blank Verse even with the most leisurely natural enunciation of the spare syllable,” and I am sure he would have stared if told that “the number of accents” in a pentameter verse was “variable.” It may be doubted whether elisions and compressions which would be thought in bad taste or even vulgar now were more abhorrent to the ears of Milton's generation than to a cultivated

¹ Exactly analogous to that in *treasurer* when it is shortened to two syllables.

Italian would be the hearing Dante read as prose. After all, what Mr. Masson says may be reduced to the infallible axiom that poetry should be read as poetry.

Mr. Masson seems to be right in his main principles, but the examples he quotes make one doubt whether he knows what a verse is. For example, he thinks it would be a "horror," if in the verse

"That invincible Samson far renowned,"

we should lay the stress on the first syllable of *invincible*. It is hard to see why this should be worse than *cónventicle* or *rémonstrance* or *súccessor* or *incómpatible* (the three latter used by the correct Daniel), or why Mr. Masson should clap an accent on *surfàce* merely because it comes at the end of a verse, and deny it to *invincible*. If one read the verse just cited with those that go with it, he will find that the accent *must* come on the first syllable of *invincible*, or else the whole passage becomes chaos.¹ Should we refuse to say *obleeged* with Pope because the fashion has changed? From its apparently greater freedom in skilful hands, blank verse

¹ Milton himself has *invisible*, for we cannot suppose him guilty of a verse like

"Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep,"

while, if read rightly, it has just one of those sweeping elisions that he loved.

gives more scope to sciolistic theorizing and dogmatism than the rhyming pentameter couplet, but it is safe to say that no verse is good in the one that would not be good in the other when handled by a master like Dryden. Milton, like other great poets, wrote some bad verses, and it is wiser to confess that they are so than to conjure up some unimaginable reason why the reader should accept them as the better for their badness. Such a bad verse is

“Rocks, caves, lakes, *fens*, bogs, *dens* and shapes of death,”

which might be cited to illustrate Pope’s

“And ten low words oft creep in one dull line.”

Milton cannot certainly be taxed with any partiality for low words. He rather loved them tall, as the Prussian King loved men to be six feet high in their stockings, and fit to go into the grenadiers. He loved them as much for their music as for their meaning,—perhaps more. His style, therefore, when it has to deal with commoner things, is apt to grow a little cumbrous and unwieldy. A Persian poet says that when the owl would boast, he boasts of catching mice at the edge of a hole. Shakespeare would have understood this. Milton would have made him talk like an eagle. His influence is not to be left out of account as partially contributing to that decline toward poetic diction which was already beginning ere he died.

If it would not be fair to say that he is the most artistic, he may be called in the highest sense the most scientific of our poets. If to Spenser younger poets have gone to be sung to, they have sat at the feet of Milton to be taught. Our language has no finer poem than "Samson Agonistes," if any so fine in the quality of austere dignity or in the skill with which the poet's personal experience is generalized into a classic tragedy.

Gentle as Milton's earlier portraits would seem to show him, he had in him by nature, or bred into him by fate, something of the haughty and defiant self-assertion of Dante and Michael Angelo. In no other English author is the man so large a part of his works. Milton's haughty conception of himself enters into all he says and does. Always the necessity of this one man became that of the whole human race for the moment. There were no walls so sacred but must go to the ground when *he* wanted elbow-room; and he wanted a great deal. Did Mary Powell, the cavalier's daughter, find the abode of a roundhead schoolmaster *incompatible* and leave it, forthwith the cry of the universe was for an easier dissolution of the marriage covenant. If *he* is blind, it is with excess of light, it is a divine partiality, an overshadowing with angels' wings. Phineus and Teiresias are admitted among the prophets because they, too, had lost

their sight, and the blindness of Homer is of more account than his "Iliad." After writing in rhyme till he was past fifty, he finds it unsuitable for his epic, and it at once becomes "the invention of a barbarous age to set off wretched matter and lame metre." If the structure of *his* mind be undramatic, why, then, the English drama is naught, learned Jonson, sweetest Shakespeare, and the rest notwithstanding, and he will compose a tragedy on a Greek model with the blinded Samson for its hero, and he will compose it partly in rhyme. Plainly he belongs to the intenser kind of men whose yesterdays are in no way responsible for their to-morrows. And this makes him perennially interesting even to those who hate his politics, despise his Socinianism, and find his greatest poem a bore. A new edition of his poems is always welcome, for, as he is really great, he presents a fresh side to each new student, and Mr. Masson, in his three handsome volumes, has given us, with much that is superfluous and even erroneous, much more that is a solid and permanent acquisition to our knowledge.

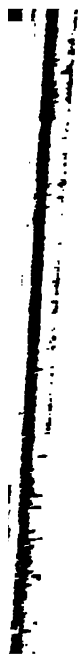
It results from the almost scornful withdrawal of Milton into the fortress of his absolute personality that no great poet is so uniformly self-conscious as he. We should say of Shakespeare that he had the power of transforming himself into everything; of Milton, that he had that of

transforming everything into himself. Dante is individual rather than self-conscious, and he, the cast-iron man, grows pliable as a field of grain at the breath of Beatrice, and flows away in waves of sunshine. But Milton never lets himself go for a moment. As other poets are possessed by their theme, so is he *self*-possessed, his great theme being John Milton, and his great duty that of interpreter between him and the world. I say it with all respect, for he was well worthy translation, and it is out of Hebrew that the version is made. Pope says he makes God the Father reason "like a school-divine." The criticism is witty, but inaccurate. He makes Deity a mouthpiece for his present theology, and had the poem been written a few years later, the Almighty would have become more heterodox. Since Dante, no one had stood on these visiting terms with heaven.

Now it is precisely this audacity of self-reliance, I suspect, which goes far toward making the sublime, and which, falling by a hair's-breadth short thereof, makes the ridiculous. Puritanism showed both the strength and weakness of its prophetic nurture; enough of the latter to be scoffed out of England by the very men it had conquered in the field, enough of the former to intrench itself in three or four immortal memories. It has left an abiding mark in politics and religion, but its great monuments

are the prose of Bunyan and the verse of Milton. It is a high inspiration to be the neighbor of great events; to have been a partaker in them, and to have seen noble purposes by their own self-confidence become the very means of ignoble ends, if it do not wholly repress, may kindle a passion of regret, deepening the song which dares not tell the reason of its sorrow. The grand loneliness of Milton in his latter years, while it makes him the most impressive figure in our literary history, is reflected also in his maturer poems by a sublime independence of human sympathy like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us. But it is idle to talk of the loneliness of one the habitual companions of whose mind were the Past and Future. I always seem to see him leaning in his blindness a hand on the shoulder of each, sure that the one will guard the song which the other had inspired.

KEATS



KEATS

1854

THERE are few poets whose works contain sligher hints of their personal history than those of Keats ; yet there are, perhaps, even fewer whose real lives, or rather the conditions upon which they lived, are more clearly traceable in what they have written. To write the life of a man was formerly understood to mean the cataloguing and placing of circumstances, of those things which stood about the life and were more or less related to it, but were not the life itself. But Biography from day to day holds dates cheaper and facts dearer. A man's life, so far as its outward events are concerned, may be made for him, as his clothes are by the tailor, of this cut or that, of finer or coarser material ; but the gait and gesture show through, and give to trappings, in themselves characterless, an individuality that belongs to the man himself. It is those essential facts which underlie the life and make the individual man that are of importance, and it is the cropping out of these upon the surface that gives us indications by which to judge of the true nature hidden below. Every man has his block given him, and the

figure he cuts will depend very much upon the shape of that,—upon the knots and twists which existed in it from the beginning. We were designed in the cradle, perhaps earlier, and it is in finding out this design, and shaping ourselves to it, that our years are spent wisely. It is the vain endeavor to make ourselves what we are not that has strewn history with so many broken purposes and lives left in the rough.

Keats hardly lived long enough to develop a well-outlined character, for that results commonly from the resistance made by temperament to the many influences by which the world, as it may happen then to be, endeavors to mould every one in its own image. What his temperament was we can see clearly, and also that it subordinated itself more and more to the discipline of art.

John Keats, the second of four children, like Chaucer and Spenser, was a Londoner, but, unlike them, he was certainly not of gentle blood. Lord Houghton, who seems to have had a kindly wish to create him gentleman by brevet, says that he was "born in the upper ranks of the middle class." This shows a commendable tenderness for the nerves of English society, and reminds one of Northcote's story of the violin-player who, wishing to compliment his pupil, George III., divided all fiddlers into three

John Keats

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.



John Keats



classes,— those who could not play at all, those who played very badly, and those who played very well,— assuring his Majesty that he had made such commendable progress as to have already reached the second rank. We shall not be too greatly shocked by knowing that the father of Keats (as Lord Houghton had told us in an earlier biography) “was employed in the establishment of Mr. Jennings, the proprietor of large livery-stables on the Pavement in Moorfields, nearly opposite the entrance into Finsbury Circus.” So that, after all, it was not so bad; for, first, Mr. Jennings was a *proprietor*; second, he was the proprietor of an *establishment*; third, he was the proprietor of a *large* establishment; and fourth, this large establishment was *nearly* opposite Finsbury Circus,— a name which vaguely dilates the imagination with all sorts of potential grandeurs. It is true Leigh Hunt asserts that Keats “was a little too sensitive on the score of his origin,”¹ but we can find no trace of such a feeling either in his poetry or in such of his letters as have been printed. We suspect the fact to have been that he resented with becoming pride the vulgar “Blackwood” and “Quarterly” standard, which measured genius by genealogies. It is enough that his poetical pedigree is of the best, tracing through Spenser to Chaucer, and that Pegasus does not stand at

¹ Hunt's *Autobiography* (Am. ed.), vol. ii. p. 36.

livery even in the largest establishments in Moorfields.

As well as we can make out, then, the father of Keats was a groom in the service of Mr. Jennings, and married the daughter of his master. Thus, on the mother's side, at least, we find a grandfather; on the father's there is no hint of such an ancestor, and we must charitably take him for granted. It is of more importance that the elder Keats was a man of sense and energy, and that his wife was a "lively and intelligent woman, who hastened the birth of the poet by her passionate love of amusement," bringing him into the world, a seven-months' child, on the 29th October, 1795, instead of the 29th of December, as would have been conventionally proper. Lord Houghton describes her as "tall, with a large oval face, and a somewhat saturnine demeanour." This last circumstance does not agree very well with what he had just before told us of her liveliness, but he consoles us by adding that "she succeeded, *however*, in inspiring her children with the profoundest affection." This was particularly true of John, who once, when between four and five years old, mounted guard at her chamber door with an old sword, when she was ill and the doctor had ordered her not to be disturbed.¹

¹ Haydon tells the story differently, but I think Lord Houghton's version the best.

In 1804, Keats being in his ninth year, his father was killed by a fall from his horse. His mother seems to have been ambitious for her children, and there was some talk of sending John to Harrow. Fortunately this plan was thought too expensive, and he was sent instead to the school of Mr. Clarke at Enfield with his brothers. A maternal uncle, who had distinguished himself by his courage under Duncan at Camperdown, was the hero of his nephews, and they went to school resolved to maintain the family reputation for courage. John was always fighting, and was chiefly noted among his school-fellows as a strange compound of pluck and sensibility. He attacked an usher who had boxed his brother's ears; and when his mother died, in 1810, was moodily inconsolable, hiding himself for several days in a nook under the master's desk, and refusing all comfort from teacher or friend.

He was popular at school, as boys of spirit always are, and impressed his companions with a sense of his power. They thought he would one day be a famous soldier. This may have been owing to the stories he told them of the heroic uncle, whose deeds, we may be sure, were properly famed by the boy Homer, and whom they probably took for an admiral at the least, as it would have been well for Keats's literary prosperity if he had been. At any rate,

they thought John would be a great man, which is the main thing, for the public opinion of the playground is truer and more discerning than that of the world, and if you tell us what the boy was, we will tell you what the man longs to be, however he may be repressed by necessity or fear of the police reports.

Lord Houghton has failed to discover anything else especially worthy of record in the school-life of Keats. He translated the twelve books of the "*Æneid*," read "*Robinson Crusoe*" and the "*Incas of Peru*," and looked into Shakespeare. He left school in 1810, with little Latin and no Greek, but he had studied Spence's "*Polymetis*," Tooke's "*Pantheon*," and Lemprière's "*Dictionary*," and knew gods, nymphs, and heroes, which were quite as good company perhaps for him as aorists and aspirates. It is pleasant to fancy the horror of those respectable writers if their pages could suddenly have become alive under their pens with all that the young poet saw in them.¹

¹ There is always some one willing to make himself a sort of accessary after the fact in any success; always an old woman or two, ready to remember omens of all quantities and qualities in the childhood of persons who have become distinguished. Accordingly, a certain "Mrs. Grafty, of Craven Street, Finsbury," assures Mr. George Keats, when he tells her that John is determined to be a poet, "that this was very odd, because when he could just speak, instead of answering questions put to him, he would always make a rhyme

On leaving school he was apprenticed for five years to a surgeon at Edmonton. His master was a Mr. Hammond, "of some eminence" in his profession, as Lord Houghton takes care to assure us. The place was of more importance than the master, for its neighborhood to Enfield enabled him to keep up his intimacy with the family of his former teacher, Mr. Clarke, and to borrow books of them. In 1812, when he was in his seventeenth year, Mr. Charles Cowden Clarke lent him the "Faery Queen." Nothing that is told of Orpheus or Amphion is more wonderful than this miracle of Spenser's, transforming a surgeon's apprentice into a great poet. Keats learned at once the secret of his birth, and henceforward his indentures ran to Apollo instead of Mr. Hammond. Thus could the Muse defend her son. It is the old story, — the lost heir discovered by his aptitude for what is gentle and knightly. Haydon tells us "that he

to the last word people said, and then laugh." The early histories of heroes, like those of nations, are always more or less mythical, and I give the story for what it is worth. Doubtless there is a gleam of intelligence in it, for the old lady pronounces it odd that any one should *determine* to be a poet, and seems to have wished to hint that the matter was determined earlier and by a higher disposing power. There are few children who do not soon discover the charm of rhyme, and perhaps fewer who can resist making fun of the Mrs. Graftys of Craven Street, Finsbury, when they have the chance. See Haydon's *Autobiography*, vol. i. p. 361.

used sometimes to say to his brother he feared he should never be a poet, and if he was not he would destroy himself." This was perhaps a half-conscious reminiscence of Chatterton, with whose genius and fate he had an intense sympathy, it may be from an inward foreboding of the shortness of his own career.¹

Before long we find him studying Chaucer, then Shakespeare, and afterward Milton. But Chapman's translations had a more abiding influence on his style both for good and evil. That he read wisely, his comments on the "Paradise Lost" are enough to prove. He now also commenced poet himself, but does not appear to have neglected the study of his profession. He was a youth of energy and purpose, and, though he no doubt penned many a stanza when he should have been anatomizing, and walked the hospitals accompanied by the early gods, nevertheless passed a very creditable examination in 1817. In the spring of this year, also, he prepared to take his first degree as poet, and accordingly published a small volume containing a selection of his earlier essays in verse. It attracted little attention, and the rest of this

¹ "I never saw the poet Keats but once, but he then read some lines from (I think) the 'Bristowe Tragedy' with an enthusiasm of admiration such as could be felt only by a poet, and which true poetry only could have excited." (J. H. C., in *Notes and Queries*, 4th ser. x. 157.)

year seems to have been occupied with a journey on foot in Scotland, and the composition of "Endymion," which was published in 1818. Milton's "Tetrachordon" was not better abused; but Milton's assailants were unorganized, and were obliged each to print and pay for his own dingy little quarto, trusting to the natural laws of demand and supply to furnish him with readers. Keats was arraigned by the constituted authorities of literary justice. They might be, nay, they were Jeffrieses and Scroggses, but the sentence was published, and the penalty inflicted before all England. The difference between his fortune and Milton's was that between being pelted by a mob of personal enemies and being set in the pillory. In the first case, the annoyance brushes off mostly with the mud; in the last, there is no solace but the consciousness of suffering in a great cause. This solace, to a certain extent, Keats had; for his ambition was noble, and he hoped not to make a great reputation, but to be a great poet. Haydon says that Wordsworth and Keats were the only men he had ever seen who looked conscious of a lofty purpose.

It is curious that men should resent more fiercely what they suspect to be good verses than what they know to be bad morals. Is it because they feel themselves incapable of the one and not of the other? Probably a certain amount of

honest loyalty to old idols in danger of dethronement is to be taken into account, and quite as much of the cruelty of criticism is due to want of thought as to deliberate injustice. However it be, the best poetry has been the most savagely attacked, and men who scrupulously practised the Ten Commandments as if there were never a *not* in any of them, felt every sentiment of their better nature outraged by the "Lyrical Ballads." It is idle to attempt to show that Keats did not suffer keenly from the vulgarities of "Blackwood" and the "Quarterly." He suffered in proportion as his ideal was high, and he was conscious of falling below it. In England, especially, it is not pleasant to be ridiculous, even if you are a lord; but to be ridiculous and an apothecary at the same time is almost as bad as it was formerly to be excommunicated. *A priori*, there was something absurd in poetry written by the son of an assistant in the livery-stables of Mr. Jennings, even though they were an establishment, and a large establishment, and nearly opposite Finsbury Circus. Mr. Gifford, the ex-cobbler, thought so in the "Quarterly," and Mr. Terry, the actor,¹ thought so even more distinctly in "Blackwood," bidding the young apothecary "back to his gallipots!" It

¹ Haydon (*Autobiography*, vol. i. p. 379) says that he "strongly suspects" Terry to have written the articles in *Blackwood*.

is not pleasant to be talked down upon by your inferiors who happen to have the advantage of position, nor to be drenched with ditch-water, though you know it to be thrown by a scullion in a garret.

Keats, as his was a temperament in which sensibility was excessive, could not but be galled by this treatment. He was galled the more that he was also a man of strong sense, and capable of understanding clearly how hard it is to make men acknowledge solid value in a person whom they have once heartily laughed at. Reputation is in itself only a farthing-candle, of wavering and uncertain flame, and easily blown out, but it is the light by which the world looks for and finds merit. Keats longed for fame, but longed above all to deserve it. To his friend Taylor he writes, "There is but one way for me. The road lies through study, application, and thought." Thrilling with the electric touch of sacred leaves, he saw in vision, like Dante, that small procession of the elder poets to which only elect centuries can add another laurelled head. Might he, too, deserve from posterity the love and reverence which he paid to those antique glories? It was no unworthy ambition, but everything was against him, — birth, health, even friends, since it was partly on their account that he was sneered at. His very name stood in his way, for Fame loves best such syllables as are sweet and

sonorous on the tongue, like Spenserian, Shakespearian. In spite of Juliet, there is a great deal in names, and when the fairies come with their gifts to the cradle of the selected child, let one, wiser than the rest, choose a name for him from which well-sounding derivatives can be made, and, best of all, with a termination in *on*. Men judge the current coin of opinion by the ring, and are readier to take without question whatever is Platonic, Baconian, Newtonian, Johnsonian, Washingtonian, Jeffersonian, Napoleonic, and all the rest. You cannot make a good adjective out of Keats, — the more pity, — and to say a thing is *Keatsy* is to condemn it. Fortune likes fine names.

Haydon tells us that Keats was very much depressed by the fortunes of his book. This was natural enough, but he took it all in a manly way, and determined to revenge himself by writing better poetry. He knew that activity, and not despondency, is the true counterpoise to misfortune. Haydon is sure of the change in his spirits, because he would come to the painting-room and sit silent for hours. But we rather think that the conversation, where Mr. Haydon was, resembled that in a young author's first play, where the other interlocutors are only brought in as convenient points for the hero to hitch the interminable web of his monologue upon. Besides, Keats had been continuing his

education this year, by a course of Elgin marbles and pictures by the great Italians, and might very naturally have found little to say about Mr. Haydon's extensive works, that he would have cared to hear. Lord Houghton, on the other hand, in his eagerness to prove that Keats was not killed by the article in the "Quarterly," is carried too far towards the opposite extreme, and more than hints that he was not even hurt by it. This would have been true of Wordsworth, who, by a constant companionship with mountains, had acquired something of their manners, but was simply impossible to a man of Keats's temperament.

On the whole, perhaps, we need not respect Keats the less for having been gifted with sensibility, and may even say, what we believe to be true, that his health was injured by the failure of his book. A man cannot have a sensuous nature and be pachydermatous at the same time, and if he be imaginative as well as sensuous, he suffers just in proportion to the amount of his imagination. It is perfectly true that what we call the world, in these affairs, is nothing more than a mere Brocken spectre, the projected shadow of ourselves; but so long as we do not know this, it is a very passable giant. We are not without experience of natures so purely intellectual that their bodies had no more concern in their mental doings and sufferings than a

house has with the good or ill fortune of its occupant. But poets are not built on this plan, and especially poets like Keats, in whom the moral seems to have so perfectly interfused the physical man, that you might almost say he could feel sorrow with his hands, so truly did his body, like that of Donne's Mistress Boulstred, think and remember and forebode. The healthiest poet of whom our civilization has been capable says that when he beholds

"Desert a beggar born,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority," —

alluding, plainly enough, to the Giffords of his day, —

"And simple truth miscalled simplicity," —

as it was long afterward in Wordsworth's case, —

"And captive Good attending Captain Ill," —

that then even he, the poet to whom, of all others, life seems to have been dearest, as it was also the fullest of enjoyment, "tired of all these," had nothing for it but to cry for "restful Death."

Keats, to all appearance, accepted his ill fortune courageously. He certainly did not overestimate "Endymion," and perhaps a sense of humor which was not wanting in him may have served as a buffer against the too importunate shock of disappointment. "He made Ritchie

promise," says Haydon, "he would carry his 'Endymion' to the great desert of Sahara and fling it in the midst." On the 9th October, 1818, he writes to his publisher, Mr. Hessey, "I cannot but feel indebted to those gentlemen who have taken my part. As for the rest, I begin to get acquainted with my own strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what 'Blackwood' or the 'Quarterly' could inflict; and also, when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine. J. S. is perfectly right in regard to 'the slipshod "Endymion."' That it is so is no fault of mine. No! though it may sound a little paradoxical, it is as good as I had power to make it by myself. Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble. I will write independently. I have written independently *without judgment*. I may write independently and *with judgment*, hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watch-

fulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself. In 'Endymion' I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest."

This was undoubtedly true, and it was naturally the side which a large-minded person would display to a friend. This is what he thought, but whether it was what he *felt*, I think doubtful. I look upon it rather as one of the phenomena of that multanimous nature of the poet, which makes him for the moment that of which he has an intellectual perception. Elsewhere he says something which seems to hint at the true state of the case. "I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man: *they make our prime objects a refuge as well as a passion.*" One cannot help contrasting Keats with Wordsworth, — the one altogether poet; the other essentially a Wordsworth, with the poetic faculty added, — the one shifting from form to form, and from style to style, and pouring his hot throbbing life into every mould; the other remaining always the individual, producing works, and not so much living in his poems as memorially recording his life in them. When

Wordsworth alludes to the foolish criticisms on his writings, he speaks serenely and generously of Wordsworth the poet, as if he were an un-biassed third person, who takes up the argument merely in the interest of literature. He towers into a bald egotism which is quite above and beyond selfishness. Poesy was his employment ; it was Keats's very existence, and he felt the rough treatment of his verses as if it had been the wounding of a limb. To Wordsworth, composing was a healthy exercise ; his slow pulse and imperturbable self-trust gave him assurance of a life so long that he could wait ; and when we read his poems we should never suspect the existence in him of any sense but that of observation, as if Wordsworth the poet were a half-mad land-surveyor, accompanied by Mr. Wordsworth the distributor of stamps as a kind of keeper. But every one of Keats's poems was a sacrifice of vitality ; a virtue went away from him into every one of them ; even yet, as we turn the leaves, they seem to warm and thrill our fingers with the flush of his fine senses, and the flutter of his electrical nerves, and we do not wonder he felt that what he did was to be done swiftly.

In the mean time his younger brother languished and died, his elder seems to have been in some way unfortunate and had gone to America, and Keats himself showed symptoms

of the hereditary disease which caused his death at last. It is in October, 1818, that we find the first allusion to a passion which was ere long to consume him. It is plain enough beforehand that those were not moral or mental graces that should attract a man like Keats. His intellect was satisfied and absorbed by his art, his books, and his friends. He could have companionship and appreciation from men ; what he craved of woman was only repose. That luxurious nature, which would have tossed uneasily on a crumpled rose-leaf, must have something softer to rest upon than intellect, something less ethereal than culture. It was his body that needed to have its equilibrium restored, the waste of his nervous energy that must be repaired by deep draughts of the overflowing life and drowsy tropical force of an abundant and healthily poised womanhood. Writing to his sister-in-law, he says of this nameless person : " She is not a Cleopatra, but is at least a Charmian ; she has a rich Eastern look ; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes the same impression as the beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any man who may address her. From habit, she thinks that *nothing particular*. I always find myself at ease with such a woman ; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with

anything inferior. I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or in a tremble. I forget myself entirely, because I live in her. You will by this time think I am in love with her, so, before I go any farther, I will tell you that I am not. She kept me awake one night, as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement, than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very *yes* and *no* of whose life [lips] is to me a banquet. . . . I like her and her like, because one has no *sensation*; what we both are is taken for granted. . . . She walks across a room in such a manner that a man is drawn toward her with magnetic power. . . . I believe, though, she has faults, the same as a Cleopatra or a Charmian might have had. Yet she is a fine thing, speaking in a worldly way; for there are two distinct tempers of mind in which we judge of things, — the worldly, theatrical, and pantomimical; and the unearthly, spiritual, and ethereal. In the former, Bonaparte, Lord Byron, and this Charmian hold the first place in our minds; in the latter, John Howard, Bishop Hooker rocking his child's cradle, and you, my dear sister, are the conquering feelings. As a man of the world, I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal being, I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me."

It is pleasant always to see Love hiding his head with such pains, while his whole body is so clearly visible, as in this extract. This lady, it seems, is not a Cleopatra, only a Charmian; but presently we find that she is imperial. He does not love her, but he would just like to be ruined by her, nothing more. This glimpse of her, with her leopardess beauty, crossing the room and drawing men after her magnetically, is all we have. She seems to have been still living in 1848, and, as Lord Houghton tells us, kept the memory of the poet sacred. "She is an East-Indian," Keats says, "and ought to be her grandfather's heir." Her name we do not know. It appears from Dilke's "Papers of a Critic" that they were betrothed: "It is quite a settled thing between John Keats and Miss —. God help them. It is a bad thing for them. The mother says she cannot prevent it, and that her only hope is that it will go off. He don't like any one to look at her or to speak to her." Alas, the tropical warmth became a consuming fire!

"His passion cruel grown took on a hue
Fierce and sanguineous."

Between this time and the spring of 1820 he seems to have worked assiduously. Of course, worldly success was of more importance than ever. He began "Hyperion," but had given it up in September, 1819, because, as he said,

"there were too many Miltonic inversions in it." He wrote "Lamia" after an attentive study of Dryden's versification. This period also produced the "Eve of St. Agnes," "Isabella," and the odes to the "Nightingale" and to the "Grecian Urn." He studied Italian, read Ariosto, and wrote part of a humorous poem, "The Cap and Bells." He tried his hand at tragedy, and Lord Houghton has published among his "Remains," "Otho the Great," and all that was ever written of "King Stephen." We think he did unwisely, for a biographer is hardly called upon to show how ill his *biographe*e could do anything.

In the winter of 1820 he was chilled in riding on the top of a stage-coach, and came home in a state of feverish excitement. He was persuaded to go to bed, and in getting between the cold sheets, coughed slightly. "That is blood in my mouth," he said; "bring me the candle; let me see this blood." It was of a brilliant red, and his medical knowledge enabled him to interpret the augury. Those narcotic odors that seem to breathe seaward, and steep in repose the senses of the voyager who is drifting toward the shore of the mysterious Other World, appeared to envelop him, and, looking up with sudden calmness, he said, "I know the color of that blood; it is arterial blood; I cannot be deceived in that color. That drop is my death-warrant; I must die."

There was a slight rally during the summer of that year, but toward autumn he grew worse again, and it was decided that he should go to Italy. He was accompanied thither by his friend, Mr. Severn, an artist. After embarking, he wrote to his friend, Mr. Brown. We give a part of this letter, which is so deeply tragic that the sentences we take almost seem to break away from the rest with a cry of anguish, like the branches of Dante's lamentable wood.

"I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much. There is one I must mention and have done with it. Even if my body would recover of itself, this would prevent it. The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I dare say you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping, — you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains, which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but Death is the great divorcer forever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed. I often wish for you, that you

might flatter me with the best. I think, without my mentioning it, for my sake, you would be a friend to Miss —— when I am dead. You think she has many faults, but for my sake think she has not one. If there is anything you can do for her by word or deed I know you will do it. I am in a state at present in which woman, merely as woman, can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss —— and my sister is amazing, — the one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my brother and sister in America; the thought of leaving Miss —— is beyond everything horrible, — the sense of darkness coming over me, — I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing; some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last nursing at Wentworth Place ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be; we cannot be created for this sort of suffering.”

To the same friend he writes again from Naples, 1st November, 1820: —

“The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. My dear Brown, I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well. I can bear to die, — I cannot bear to leave her. O God! God! God! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of

her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling-cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her, — I see her, I hear her. There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her a moment. This was the case when I was in England; I cannot recollect, without shuddering, the time that I was a prisoner at Hunt's, and used to keep my eyes fixed on Hampstead all day. Then there was a good hope of seeing her again, — now! — O that I could be buried near where she lives! I am afraid to write to her, to receive a letter from her, — to see her handwriting would break my heart. Even to hear of her anyhow, to see her name written, would be more than I can bear. My dear Brown, what am I to do? Where can I look for consolation or ease? If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me. Indeed, through the whole of my illness, both at your house and at Kentish Town, this fever has never ceased wearing me out."

The two friends went almost immediately from Naples to Rome, where Keats was treated with great kindness by the distinguished physician, Dr. (afterward Sir James) Clark.¹ But

¹ The lodging of Keats was on the Piazza di Spagna, in the first house on the right hand in going up the Scalinata. Mr. Severn's Studio is said to have been in the Cancelli over the garden gate of the Villa Negroni, pleasantly familiar to all

there was no hope from the first. His disease was beyond remedy, as his heart was beyond comfort. The very fact that life might be happy deepened his despair. He might not have sunk so soon, but the waves in which he was struggling looked only the blacker that they were shone upon by the signal-torch that promised safety and love and rest.

It is good to know that one of Keats's last pleasures was in hearing Severn read aloud from a volume of Jeremy Taylor. On first coming to Rome, he had bought a copy of Alfieri, but, finding on the second page these lines,

“Misera me! sollievo a me non resta
Altro che il pianto, ed il pianto è delitto,”

he laid down the book and opened it no more. On the 14th February, 1821, Severn speaks of a change that had taken place in him toward greater quietness and peace. He talked much, and fell at last into a sweet sleep, in which he seemed to have happy dreams. Perhaps he heard the soft footfall of the angel of Death, pacing to and fro under his window, to be his Valentine. That night he asked to have this epitaph inscribed upon his gravestone:—

“HERE LIES ONE WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER.”

On the 23d he died, without pain and as if fall-

Americans as the Roman home of their countryman Crawford.

ing asleep. His last words were, "I am dying; I shall die easy; don't be frightened, be firm and thank God it has come!"

He was buried in the Protestant burial-ground at Rome, in that part of it which is now disused and secluded from the rest. A short time before his death he told Severn that he thought his intensest pleasure in life had been to watch the growth of flowers; and once, after lying peacefully awhile, he said, "I feel the flowers growing over me." His grave is marked by a little headstone on which are carved somewhat rudely his name and age, and the epitaph dictated by himself. No tree or shrub has been planted near it, but the daisies, faithful to their buried lover, crowd his small mound with a galaxy of their innocent stars, more prosperous than those under which he lived.¹

In person, Keats was below the middle height, with a head small in proportion to the breadth of his shoulders. His hair was brown and fine, falling in natural ringlets about a face in which energy and sensibility were remarkably mixed.

¹ Written in 1854. O irony of Time! Ten years after the poet's death the woman he had so loved wrote to his friend Mr. Dilke, that "the kindest act would be to let him rest forever in the obscurity to which circumstances had condemned him"! (*Papers of a Critic*, i. 11.) O Time the atoner! In 1874 I found the grave planted with shrubs and flowers, the pious homage of the daughter of our most eminent American sculptor.

Every feature was delicately cut; the chin was bold, and about the mouth something of a pugnacious expression. His eyes were mellow and glowing, large, dark, and sensitive. At the recital of a noble action or a beautiful thought they would suffuse with tears, and his mouth trembled.¹ Haydon says that his eyes had an inward Delphian look that was perfectly divine.

The faults of Keats's poetry are obvious enough, but it should be remembered that he died at twenty-five, and that he offends by superabundance and not poverty. That he was overlanguageed at first there can be no doubt, and in this was implied the possibility of falling back to the perfect mean of diction. It is only by the rich that the costly plainness, which at once satisfies the taste and the imagination, is attainable.

Whether Keats was original or not, I do not think it useful to discuss until it has been settled what originality is. Lord Houghton tells us that this merit (whatever it be) has been denied to Keats, because his poems take the color of the authors he happened to be reading at the time he wrote them. But men have their intellectual ancestry, and the likeness of some one of them is forever unexpectedly flashing out in the features of a descendant, it may be after a gap of several generations. In the parliament

¹ Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*, ii. 43.

of the present every man represents a constituency of the past. It is true that Keats has the accent of the men from whom he learned to speak, but this is to make originality a mere question of externals, and in this sense the author of a dictionary might bring an action of trover against every author who used his words. It is the man behind the words that gives them value, and if Shakespeare help himself to a verse or a phrase, it is with ears that have learned of him to listen that we feel the harmony of the one, and it is the mass of his intellect that makes the other weighty with meaning. Enough that we recognize in Keats that indefinable newness and unexpectedness which we call genius. The sunset is original every evening, though for thousands of years it has built out of the same light and vapor its visionary cities with domes and pinnacles, and its delectable mountains which night shall utterly abase and destroy.

Three men, almost contemporaneous with each other, — Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron, — were the great means of bringing back English poetry from the sandy deserts of rhetoric, and recovering for her her triple inheritance of simplicity, sensuousness, and passion. Of these, Wordsworth was the only conscious reformer, and his hostility to the existing formalism injured his earlier poems by tingeing them with something of iconoclastic extravagance. He was the deepest

thinker, Keats the most essentially a poet, and Byron the most keenly intellectual of the three. Keats had the broadest mind, or at least his mind was open on more sides, and he was able to understand Wordsworth and judge Byron, equally conscious, through his artistic sense, of the greatnesses of the one and the many littlenesses of the other, while Wordsworth was isolated in a feeling of his prophetic character, and Byron had only an uneasy and jealous instinct of contemporary merit. The poems of Wordsworth, as he was the most individual, accordingly reflect the moods of his own nature; those of Keats, from sensitiveness of organization, the moods of his own taste and feeling; and those of Byron, who was impressible chiefly through the understanding, the intellectual and moral wants of the time in which he lived. Wordsworth has influenced most the ideas of succeeding poets; Keats, their forms; and Byron, interesting to men of imagination less for his writings than for what his writings indicate, reappears no more in poetry, but presents an ideal to youth made restless with vague desires not yet regulated by experience nor supplied with motives by the duties of life.

Keats certainly had more of the penetrative and sympathetic imagination which belongs to the poet, of that imagination which identifies itself with the momentary object of its contem-

plation, than any man of these later days. It is not merely that he has studied the Elizabethans and caught their turn of thought, but that he really sees things with their sovereign eye, and feels them with their electrified senses. His imagination was his bliss and bane. Was he cheerful, he "hops about the gravel with the sparrows"; was he morbid, he "would reject a Petrarcian coronation, — on account of my dying day, and because women have cancers." So impressible was he as to say that he "had no nature," meaning character. But he knew what the faculty was worth, and says finely, "The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream: he awoke and found it truth." He had an unerring instinct for the poetic uses of things, and for him they had no other use. We are apt to talk of the classic *renaissance* as of a phenomenon long past, nor ever to be renewed, and to think the Greeks and Romans alone had the mighty magic to work such a miracle. To me one of the most interesting aspects of Keats is that in him we have an example of the *renaissance* going on almost under our own eyes, and that the intellectual ferment was in him kindled by a purely English leaven. He had properly no scholarship, any more than Shakespeare had, but like him he assimilated at a touch whatever could serve his purpose. His delicate senses absorbed culture at every pore. Of the self-

denial to which he trained himself (unexampled in one so young) the second draft of "Hyperion" as compared with the first is a conclusive proof. And far indeed is his "Lamia" from the lavish indiscrimination of "Endymion." In his Odes he showed a sense of form and proportion which we seek vainly in almost any other English poet, and some of his sonnets (taking all qualities into consideration) are the most perfect in our language. No doubt there is something tropical and of strange overgrowth in his sudden maturity, but it *was* maturity nevertheless. Happy the young poet who has the saving fault of exuberance, if he have also the shaping faculty that sooner or later will amend it!

As every young person goes through all the world-old experiences, fancying them something peculiar and personal to himself, so it is with every new generation, whose youth always finds its representatives in its poets. Keats rediscovered the delight and wonder that lay enchanted in the dictionary. Wordsworth revolted at the poetic diction which he found in vogue, but his own language rarely rises above it, except when it is upborne by the thought. Keats had an instinct for fine words, which are in themselves pictures and ideas, and had more of the power of poetic expression than any modern English poet. And by poetic expression I do not mean merely a vividness in particulars, but the right

feeling which heightens or subdues a passage or a whole poem to the proper tone, and gives entireness to the effect. There is a great deal more than is commonly supposed in this choice of words. Men's thoughts and opinions are in a great degree vassals of him who invents a new phrase or reapplies an old epithet. The thought or feeling a thousand times repeated becomes his at last who utters it best. This power of language is veiled in the old legends which make the invisible powers the servants of some word. As soon as we have discovered the word for our joy or sorrow we are no longer its serfs, but its lords. We reward the discoverer of an anæsthetic for the body and make him member of all the societies, but him who finds a nepenthe for the soul we elect into the small academy of the immortals.

The poems of Keats mark an epoch in English poetry; for, however often we may find traces of it in others, in them found its most unconscious expression that reaction against the barrel-organ style which had been reigning by a kind of sleepy divine right for half a century. The lowest point was indicated when there was such an utter confounding of the common and the uncommon sense that Dr. Johnson wrote verse and Burke prose. The most profound gospel of criticism was, that nothing was good poetry that could not be translated into good

prose, as if one should say that the test of sufficient moonlight was that tallow candles could be made of it. We find Keats at first going to the other extreme, and endeavoring to extract green cucumbers from the rays of tallow; but we see also incontestable proof of the greatness and purity of his poetic gift in the constant return toward equilibrium and repose in his later poems. And it is a repose always lofty and clear-aired, like that of the eagle balanced in incommunicable sunshine. In him a vigorous understanding developed itself in equal measure with the divine faculty; thought emancipated itself from expression without becoming in turn its tyrant; and music and meaning floated together, accordant as swan and shadow, on the smooth element of his verse. Without losing its sensuousness, his poetry refined itself and grew more inward, and the sensational was elevated into the typical by the control of that finer sense which underlies the senses and is the spirit of them.

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